SERMONS

ON THE

Following SUBJECTS.

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Of the true happineſs of man.

The miſchiefs of vanity, and an affected wiſdom.

The diſtinct offices and uſes of reaſon, and revelation.

Of blaſphemy, and prophane ſwearing.

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On the Mediation of Chriſt.

By JAMES FOSTER.

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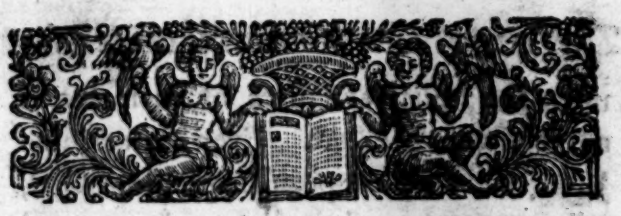

SERMON I.

The Love of God a rational principle; and a moral virtue.

MATTH. xxii. 37, 38.

----Jesus *said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.*

AT the time of our Saviour's appearance the world was extremely depraved, and stood in great need of a reformation. The *principles*, and *practice* of true religion were very much corrupted, and its influence upon

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upon the hearts and lives of men was in a great meaſure loſt. Even among the *Jews*, who were the peculiar people of God, religion ſeems to have been degenerated into outward *pomp* and *formality*. Their great and leading men, and moſt eminent and celebrated ſects, affected chiefly to be maſters of ceremony and devout grimace, and wore the *garb* of religion, in order to advance their honour and influence among the people; and having reſolved the whole of it into *external rites*, and a multitude of vain *traditional obſervances*, were generally regardleſs of the obligations of *moral virtue*, and the ſubſtantial immutable duties of a *holy life*. The Scribes, and Phariſees, and Doctors of the law were, in the main, men of profligate and abandoned principles, a ſet of deſigning hypocrites; who made uſe of an aukward *ſingularity* of dreſs, a demure mortified look, and the artifice of a *ſpecious devotion*, to ſkreen their tyrannical impoſitions on conſcience, their injuſtice, fraud and cruelty, from public cenſure. And, therefore, as our bleſſed Saviour, inſtead of complimenting their *vanity*, took very

great

great and unusual liberties in reproving their *vices*; as he endeavour'd to expose their absurd traditions and subtle pretences to piety, by which they had cheated and amused the ignorant and credulous vulgar; and instead of *ceremony* and *affectation*, which had too long usurped the venerable name of religion, to introduce *sincere* and *undefiled* religion, consisting in purity of conscience and a virtuous life—They apprehended that their *craft* was in danger, and that if he should succeed in his attempts to establish this *new* reforming doctrine, their credit and authority must sink; upon which account, they had recourse to the vilest and most senseless methods of calumny to blacken his reputation, and prosecuted his ruin with indefatigable zeal and malice. But because they could find nothing worthy of public disgrace, or death, in his regular unblemished character; and if they should lay violent hands on him, it might *then* have rendered them obnoxious to the resentment of the people (many of whom had some kind of reverence of him, on account of the *force* and *excellency* of his

SERM. I. doctrine, and the mighty works which he performed, generally of *beneficence* and *friendship* to mankind) they endeavoured to ensnare him by *captious* questions, that they might find some matter of *plausible* accusation against him, and take away his life under the *colour* of law and justice.

OF this we have several instances in the chapter of my text.——Their first stratagem was to inquire of him about the *lawfulness* of paying tribute to *Cæsar*, expecting, perhaps, that he would have said something in prejudice of *Cæsar*'s authority, and injurious to his imperial dignity; and thereby have exposed himself to the cognisance of the *Roman* government, as a fomentor of *sedition*. The reply he gave to this, which could neither alarm the *jealousy* of the *Romans*, nor incense his own *country-men* against him for publickly defending their unjust *usurpation*, is an undeniable proof of his consummate wisdom in a thorough knowledge of Human nature, and suiting his discourse to *seasons* and *circumstances*.——After this came the *Sadducees*, and put to him, as they thought, a *nice* and *critical* question concerning

cerning the resurrection; but were answered, with great strength and superiority of judgment, even from the writings of *Moses*, the divine authority of which themselves acknowledged, to their own entire *confusion*, and the great *surprise* of the multitude.—— Being disappointed in this scheme likewise, we read next of a certain *Lawyer*, or a teacher and expounder of the law of *Moses*, who asked him *a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which* is *the great commandment in the law?* To this our Saviour replies in the text: And his words contain notions of religion so *sublime* and *rational*, so *full* and *comprehensive*, and assert, with such clearness and strength, the necessary *subordination* of positive and ritual, to irreversible moral ordinances, that their being recorded must be to the *eternal honour* of Christianity. *Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind: This is the first and great commandment. And the second* is *like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self. On these two commandments hang all the*

SERM. I. *law and the prophets.* The Love of God and of our Neighbour are the two grand and fundamental principles of religion; from whence all the duties of it *flow*, and into which, as their general sources, they may be all resolved. The *first* of these I intend to make the subject of my present discourse, which I shall pursue in the following method.

FIRST, I shall consider the *nature* of the duty enjoined in the text.

SECONDLY, inquire into the *reasons* of it.

THIRDLY, shew briefly why it is stiled the *first* and *great commandment*? And then endeavour to prove,

IN the FOURTH place, that the *Fear* and the *Love* of God are perfectly consistent, and may be both cultivated in such a manner as not to *destroy*, or in the least *weaken*, each other.

FIRST, I am to consider the *nature* of the duty here recommended. The Love of God, as it is a principle or affection in

in the mind, is a proper *esteem* of him on account of his natural and relative excellencies, accompanied with a suitable *delight* and *complacency* in him. The Object of Love must necessarily be somewhat *beautiful*, *good*, and *desirable:* For there is a natural aversion in the mind of man to *evil* and *deformity*. And tho' mens understandings may be sometimes so darkened, and their judgment of things so perverted by irregular lusts and corrupt prejudices, as to mistake *deformity* for *beauty*; and tho' under the influence of such a wrong biass, they may really pursue *confusion* and *misery* under the notion of *order* and *happiness*; yet it is absolutely impossible that they should love and chuse the *evil*, or hate and refuse the *good*, when the mind discerns them in their *proper characters*. The foundation of Love, therefore, must be excellence *real*, or *supposed:* And this I have distinguished into *natural* and *relative*, meaning by natural the *intrinsic goodness* and *beauty* of the object, and by relative its *use* and *agreeableness* to us. So that we love the Deity as an absolutely perfect Spirit, and the most *amiable*

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SERM. I. of all Beings *in himself*, and as communicating *good* to *us* *, and the only source of full and complete happiness. But then our Love of God is of a much more *refined* kind than the love of external and visible objects: " For with respect to the *latter*, " it is, in a great measure, accompanied " with *animal affections* and *instincts*, and " must therefore be more *strong* and *sen-* " *sible*, because all the impressions, which " such objects make upon us, are con- " veyed by the *senses*. Whereas the " Love of God, who is an invisible Spi- " rit, will not be attended with such *rap-* " *ture* and *emotion* (which is only the " *Mechanism* of the animal part) but is " *pure* and *intellectual*. The *understand-* " *ing* approves of and esteems him as the " highest excellence, and the chiefest " good; upon which we are determined " to place our ultimate delight and sa-

* *i. e.* To us *men*, to *all* mankind indiscriminately, (and upon the same general foundation of reason, in the same equitable and fit proportions, to the *whole system* of rational beings) —— not to any *individuals* arbitrarily and wantonly distinguished; which construction would be quite inconsistent with what the author has asserted in other parts of this discourse.

" tisfaction

"tisfaction in him." And for this reason, *viz.* because the Love of God "is not "properly *a passion*," as is the affection we bear to sensible objects, I chuse to call it *an Esteem* of him upon the account of his excellencies.

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Now in order to raise this *sublime* and *noble* principle in our minds, it is in the nature of the thing necessary not only that there be some *general* knowledge of God, but that we entertain in the main *just* apprehensions of his infinite perfections. We must be convinced of his *worth* and *excellence*, before we can, in a rational and regular way, make him the object of our *esteem*; which will be rightly exercised, or the contrary, as our knowledge is more or less *exact*, and increase in proportion to the *degrees* of it. But then the *knowledge* of God, which influences to the sincere Love of him, must not be *an abstracted notion*, but a *warm* and *vigorous* principle; or, in other words, our Love of God is not founded on the mere *apprehension* of his excellencies, but upon a strong and lively *sense* of them in the mind. For many are far advanced in the *speculative* knowledge

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knowledge of the Deity, and yet instead of being directed, by a principle of *Love* towards him, to an imitation of his perfections and the practice of virtue, oppose his authority, and cherish such *dark* and *mischievous* dispositions, as are directly repugnant to his most amiable and spotless nature; because they will not take due care to cultivate, and *impress*, the *right idea* of him, as a Being supremely excellent, and their only happiness, and of the immense obligations they are under to him, for the numberless instances of his favour and goodness. But when we are once established in *just* and *worthy* conceptions of our Maker, and our *knowledge* of him is, by proper meditation and spiritual exercises, improved to an *habitual lively sense* of his consummate and incomparable beauties, the mind will naturally *adhere* to him as the worthiest object of its *love*; and from a strong conviction of his absolute perfection, *prefer* him to all other beings, and center its supreme *complacency* in him. This is a general view of the methods, by which that sublime *moral* virtue, which is declared by our Lord in the text to be the

first

first and most necessary duty of religion, is *planted* in the mind; by which also it is *confirm'd* and *establish'd*, and *carried on* to the most exalted pitch of purity and fervor.

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IT is of the utmost importance to observe further, that the Love of God is not a close silent affection in the soul, but an *active* principle. "It does not consist in "*inward raptures*, in a *mechanical heat* "and *agitation* of the passions, and a *re-* "*tired contemplation* of the beauty of its "object; but discovers itself in *visible* "*fruits* of benevolence."——*This is the Love of God*, says St. *John*, *that we keep his commandments: And his commandments are not grievous.* And again —— *Whoso keepeth his word, in him, verily, is the Love of God perfected. In this* therefore, as the same Apostle speaks, *the children of God are manifest, and the children of the Devil: Whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God.* So that to render our account of this most excellent and refined virtue complete, we must upon the whole define it thus —— "That it is such an *esteem* of "the Deity, accompanied with a strong

1 John v. 3.

1 John ii. 5.

1 John iii. 10.

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" *delight* in him, as produces in us *a con-* " *formity* to his moral perfections, and " an *exact obſervance* of his precepts". Having explained thus largely the *nature* of the Love of God: I proceed

SECONDLY, to inquire into the *reaſons* of it. The mind of *man* (as has been already obſerved) and the ſame may be ſaid with reſpect to *all* rational beings; the mind of *man*, I ſay, is ſo framed, that *beauty* and *excellence* are naturally the objects of his affection. They attract, in a manner, *irreſiſtibly*, when diſcern'd in a proper and advantageous light; and nothing but ignorance, inconſideration, or an extremely corrupt and diſorderly habit, can *prevent* their producing this effect. " And if excellence in any Being " be a *juſt foundation* of our eſteem, it " neceſſarily follows, that the eſteem " ought to *increaſe* in proportion to the " degrees of it: So that as a *lower rank* " of perfection demands an *inferior* re- " gard, *abſolute*, or the *higheſt poſſible*, " perfection muſt be intitled to our *ſu-* " *preme* and *ultimate regard*."

WHEN

WHEN we *raiſe* our thoughts up to the Moſt High, and ſeriouſly contemplate the *glories* of his character, our minds are raviſhed with the view of ſuch *conſummate* and *boundleſs* excellence. There are no *ſhades* or *ſpots* in his nature, but all is abſolute and unclouded *light*. There is not the leaſt *defect*, as there muſt be in the *higheſt* of derived beings; but we behold an *inexhauſtible fund* of perfection to engage our admiration, and are loſt in the immenſity of the object. Our *Love* therefore, if it be regularly exerciſed toward ſuch a Being as this, muſt be elevated to the higheſt pitch of *life* and *energy*: It requires the utmoſt *purity* and *ſtrength* of our faculties, ſince it is converſant about ſuch *a tranſcendently amiable* Object, whoſe *beauties* exceed all our ideas, and the moſt laviſh and magnificent deſcription. All the ſeveral glories of the creation, and the varieties of excellence which are diſperſed among the beings that inhabit it, are derived from *him*; and are indeed but the *ſhadow* of that boundleſs perfection which himſelf poſſeſſes; and would, if collected together into *one ſum*, be infinitely infe-

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rior to it. And what is the practical result of this, but that as God is *supremely* excellent, and the *great Original* and *Fountain* of all the scattered beauties that appear in the universe, he must be worthy of our chief and most devoted affection? A *cold* and *indifferent* regard is very unsuitable to the merit of such an infinite, all-sufficient Good; and the allowing any other a *co-ordinate* share in our esteem the greatest affront, that can be offered, to the unrivalled sovereignty of his perfections.

BUT it may be useful to inquire more particularly — "What *kind* of *excellencies* "they are in the Divine mind, which in-"title him thus to our supreme Love." As he is absolute, he must be most highly *adorable* in *all* his perfections; but *Lovely* only in his *moral* character. For no man *loves* the bare self-existence and eternity of God; in like manner we cannot be said to *love* infinite power: There is something *awful* and *majestic* in these characters, they command a more solemn and distant regard, and strike rather with *surprise* and *astonishment*. And even *wisdom* itself, tho' it be allowed to be an excellent quality, is

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not, abſtractly conſider'd, the foundation of Love; becauſe it is no farther valuable, than as it ſerves the purpoſes of juſtice and goodneſs: Which appears plainly from this ſingle conſideration, that if it be perverted to the contriving and ſupporting of oppreſſive and miſchievous ſchemes, it becomes immediately, in all rational minds, the object of *contempt* and *averſion*. So that it is the infinite *goodneſs*, or the *perfection* of God in his *moral* character, which alone renders him ſo juſtly and tranſcendently amiable: Or, in other words, we are obliged to love him above all, and in the moſt perfect manner, becauſe he is a Being abſolutely righteous, benevolent and merciful; and the reflexion upon his neceſſary Exiſtence, Omnipotence, and infinite Knowledge, comes in no otherwiſe than thus — "That the excellent and uſeful moral characters above-mentioned, are *unchangeably* eſſential to him; that he imploys his boundleſs *wiſdom* in *propoſing*, and his irreſiſtible *power* in *doing good*." His *infinite benevolence* always inclining him to adminiſter impartial juſtice, and diffuſe happi-

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neſs through the creation, is the *true* and *proper* reaſon why we *love* him; and his natural attributes are only ſo far *lovely*, as they are *ſubſervient* to his goodneſs, and enable him more effectually to *execute* what that ſuggeſts and prompts him to.

NAY, I may proceed another ſtep, and add to what has been already ſaid, "That "even *particular inſtances* of favour and "beneficence in the Deity, are not the "rational foundation of the Love we owe "him, but *the goodneſs of his nature only*." We are taught indeed, by inſtinct, ſtrongly to affect our ſelves; but notwithſtanding this, in the reaſon of things, particular benefits conferr'd on us ought not to be the *abſolute meaſure* of our love to any being, becauſe it is poſſible that they may not proceed from a *benevolent temper*, or a *real deſire* of our happineſs, but from baſe and unworthy principles: And when this is the caſe, he that is the *inſtrument* of good to us (tho' we muſt, doubtleſs, be *pleas'd* with the event) cannot juſtly be the object of our *eſteem*. Again, if a being ſhould *arbitrarily* chooſe *us* for his favorites, and at the ſame time, without any

any *provocation*, delight in tormenting *the rest* of our fellow-creatures, and in making them miſerable; could we, as indued with intelligent powers, and capable of diſtinguiſhing the *morality* of actions, *love* one who was ſo capricious and tyrannical in diſpenſing good and evil? Or rather, at the ſame time that we felt the kindly influences of his favor, ſhould we not be filled with an inward *deteſtation* of the partial and miſchievous diſpoſition, by which he was acted? It ſeems to me, that this muſt be the *firſt unperverted* ſenſe of a good-natur'd and generous mind. But when it contemplates the Father of the univerſe in the *exertions*, and *final ſcope*, of his benevolence, a quite different ſcene preſents itſelf, a ſcene of delight and rapture: For his goodneſs, which is unbounded in the *principle*, and univerſal and infinite in its *effects*, affords the nobleſt idea of *perfection* we can poſſibly form; and where there is not either a great want of *reflection*, or an uncommon *degeneracy*, muſt inſpire the moſt exalted ſentiments of veneration, love and gratitude. I ſhall conclude this head with ob-

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ſerving, that as God is *lovely* only in his *moral* character, and not on account of his eternity, power, knowlege, or other *natural* properties, we may from hence collect a ſure *rule*, by which to *value* our ſelves; and that is, not to frame an opinion of *merit* from endowments of a natural or accidental kind, but to fix the reaſon of our *ſelf-eſteem* in, and proportion *it* to, the degrees of our real and intrinſic goodneſs. I am now to conſider briefly,

IN the THIRD place, why our Saviour ſtiles the precept contained in the text *the firſt, and great, commandment?*——It is the *firſt principle* of *all* religion; the very notion of which is founded on the Love of God, and a ſerious regard to his authority.—— It is the *chief duty* of religion; becauſe our obligations to it are of a higher and ſtronger nature, than to any other duty: It ought therefore above all things to be ſtrictly and conſcientiouſly obſerved.—— It is the *root* and *fountain* of *all other* virtues, eſpecially of the *ſocial* virtues; of all offices of juſtice, huma-

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nity and benevolence; which are inſeparably *connected* with it, and never fail to be *produced* by it, when it is a genuine and vigorous affection. —— And finally, as a *moral* virtue, it is infinitely preferable, not only to the wild freaks of a fanciful ſuperſtition, but even to *rites* and *ceremonies* of divine appointment. That this was the thing more immediately in our Lord's intention, ſeems probable from St. *Mark*'s account of the matter, from whence it is plain that the lawyer apprehended him thus, and therefore return'd the following anſwer: *Well, Maſter, thou haſt ſaid the truth; for there is one God, and there is none other but he. And to love him with all the heart, and with all the underſtanding, and with all the ſoul, and with all the ſtrength, and to love his neighbour as himſelf, is more than all whole burnt-offerings and ſacrifices.* Mark xii. 32, 33.

THE LAST thing that I propoſed to ſhew was, that the *Fear* and the *Love* of God are perfectly *conſiſtent*, and may both be cultivated in ſuch a manner, as not to *deſtroy*, or in the leaſt *weaken* each

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other. The Fear of God is not, what many ſuppoſe it to be, a *ſlaviſh* principle, but a *filial* reverence; not the *dread* of a *tyrant*, but the veneration and humble regard that ought to be paid to a compaſſionate Father, to a wiſe and gracious Sovereign: Which at the ſame time, that it repreſents him as *terrible* in his vengeance, when the iniquities of his creatures demand and *force* the execution of it, repreſents him likewiſe as the moſt *amiable* and *delightful* object of our contemplation. If therefore we conceive of him as an *arbitrary* Being, who acts without regard to the reaſon of things, as a *pettiſh* Being, eaſy to be affronted, but ſlow in forgiving, as *ſevere* and *rigorous* in his demands, *revengeful* and *inexorable*, ready to take all advantages *againſt* mankind, and delighting in their *miſery*; or conſider only his abſolute *dominion* and *power*, but do not take into our idea, that this dominion and power *are never exercis'd*, but by the direction of infinite Wiſdom, Juſtice, and Goodneſs; and when we have entertained ſuch a formidable notion of him, cannot think of him without

out confusion and anxiety: —— "This "is not to *fear* God as reason and reli- "gion dictate, but really to *dishonour* "him. It is forming a character which "exists *no where*, but in our *distempered* "imaginations;" and a character that is as disparaging to the glorious perfections of the Deity, as it is fatal to our own peace and comfort. For the religious Fear of God is nothing else, but the reverence due to a Being supremely and immutably perfect. If therefore we are afraid of him as a *stern* despotic Sovereign, we are mistaken in the very *ground* of our Fear: For he is a righteous and most merciful Governor. And if we consider his irresistible power only, and are *frighted* at the thought of it, as what is capable of making the whole creation completely miserable, our Fears are equally unreasonable; because "there is no *such Being* in "the universe, as one possess'd of an un- "bounded power, *that is not under the* "*conduct* of unerring Wisdom, and most "perfect Goodness." So that it appears, that the great God is the just object of our *reverence*, and yet infinitely *amiable*; or, in

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SERM. I. other words, that the Love and the Fear of God are *inſeparably connected*, and that they ſpring, indeed, from *the ſame general principles.*

AND it is for want of conſidering the matter in this view, that men have been ſo apt to run into one, or other, of theſe two *extremes*, equally miſchievous to the cauſe of virtue and true religion: Either conceiving of the Deity as *all goodneſs*, without taking at all into their idea his infinite *wiſdom*, by which the exerciſe of his goodneſs is always directed and regulated; or elſe, entirely *dropping* his goodneſs, and thinking on him only as a Being *abſolute* in power, and *rigid* in juſtice. Whereas the only way, in which we can have a right and worthy notion of him, is to conſider *all* his perfections as in a neceſſary *union* and *harmony* with each other. Otherwiſe we may *love* him, or rather, ſince ſuch a *weak* character cannot be the object of a rational *eſteem* and *complacency*, we may take a pleaſure in repreſenting him to our minds as an *eaſy* Being, who has no reſentment of the violation of his laws and contempt of his authority, and

from

from whom we apprehend no *evil*, how-ever irregular our behaviour may be;—— but we cannot *reverence* him:——Or elſe, he will be ſo *terrible* to our imaginations, that we ſhall always be *diſtracted*, and filled with *averſion* and *horror*, at the thought of him;——And if this be the caſe, it is in the nature of things impoſſible we ſhould *love* him.

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SERMON II.

Of the true Happineſs of Man.

PSALM iv. 6.

There be *many that ſay, who will ſhew us* any *good?*---LORD, *lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.*

THE all-wiſe God hath interwoven a deſire of *Happineſs*, and an averſion to *Pain* and *Miſery*, with the very conſtitution of Human nature. This is a principle implanted in the *animal creation*, as well as in mankind: But there is this difference between us and them; that whereas they are determined

SERM. II. termined to the purſuit of Happineſs by a *blind impulſe*, we have *reaſon* and *underſtanding* to deliberate about what is beſt for us, and a power of proſecuting whatever appears to be ſo after cloſe and ſerious thinking, and impartial weighing the nature of things. And, ſurely, we muſt be very beſotted and extravagant creatures, if we haſtily, and without due enquiry, take up with any thing for our *ſupreme good*, when the Happineſs of our being to *eternity* depends upon the determination which we *now* make; and if we are not certain, before we venture upon any particular courſe of action, that it will *end* well, and be, upon the whole, to our advantage. *Pilate*'s addreſs to our bleſſed Saviour was about a matter of vaſt importance, when he aſk'd him, *what is Truth?* But this ſeems to be queſtion of ſtill greater conſequence——What is *Happineſs?*——Becauſe the juſt ſolution of it, at the ſame time that it delivers the mind from a troubleſome and dangerous uncertainty, will lead it to the knowlege of the moſt eſſential branches of *moral truth*, and enable it rightly to underſtand the general

general principles of virtue and religion. I ſhall, therefore, in the following diſcourſe,

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IN the FIRST place, lay down ſome *rules*, to direct us in our *inquiries* after Happineſs.

SECONDLY, conſider the reaſon ſuggeſted in the text, why ſo great a part of the world, tho' they are prompted by an ardent and inextinguiſhible inſtinct in nature to *purſue* Happineſs, *miſs* of their *end?* And then ſhew,

THIRDLY, That the favor of God, and his approbation of them as their Governor and Judge, is abſolutely neceſſary to the *Happineſs* of *Mankind*, and of *all* intelligent Beings.

FIRST, I am to lay down ſome *rules*, to direct us in our *inquiries* after Happineſs. This is a matter of the firſt and utmoſt importance; becauſe if we have no *ſure principles* to proceed upon to lead us to the point in view, and enable us to diſtinguiſh *real* and *ſubſtantial* Happineſs from

SERM. II. from ſpecious and deluſive appearances, our *judgment* muſt of neceſſity be confuſed, and our *choice* wild and indiſcriminate: And the fixing the foundation *wrong*, is the cauſe of the moſt deplorable errors and miſeries of Human life. I would therefore recommend the following *rules* as abſolutely, and univerſally, neceſſary to be ſtrictly obſerved, and conſtantly adher'd to——That we aim at a *Happineſs* which is agreeable to our *nature*, to our *whole nature*; but eſpecially to our *diſtinguiſhed* and more *exalted* faculties.—That our proſpects and expectations be *juſt* and *reaſonable*, ſuch as we may *honourably* entertain, and *probably* execute; and find to yield, not an *imaginary*, but a *ſolid* ſatisfaction.——That the *Happineſs* we ultimately propoſe, be that which is ſuited to *every ſituation* we may be placed in, *every character* we may ſuſtain, and to the various unavoidable *changes* and *viciſſitudes* of life:——That which is moſt certainly *attainable*, and moſt eaſily *ſecured*; which is, in its own nature, moſt *permanent* and *durable*, and guarded aginſt external accidents:—— That which may be purſued

and enjoyed without *ſhame* or *anxiety*, without *ſuſpicion* of wrong conduct, or *fear* of future ill conſequences:—Which will ſtand the teſt of deliberate *reflection*, and improve upon longer *experience*, that will ſupport a calm and ſteady *ſerenity*, and moſt effectually deliver us from turbulent and diſquieting *paſſions*. And there are two things more to be added, to make our *direction* and *rule* of judgment complete: The one is, that the *Happineſs* we aim at be *uniform*, and not *inconſiſtent* with itſelf——The other, that it reſpect the *whole* of our exiſtence. I beg leave, in as brief a manner as the importance of the ſubject will admit, to explain and illuſtrate each of theſe rules.

AND FIRST, the *Happineſs*, which we aim at, muſt be agreeable to our *nature*, to our *whole nature*; but eſpecially to our *diſtinguiſhed* and more *exalted* faculties. "Our own original frame, and the "conſtitution and order of nature, are "the *ſtandard* from which we ought ne-"ver to depart, in judging not only of "*truth* and *virtue*, but of *Happineſs*." For if the Happineſs we deſign for ourſelves, be

SERM. II. be *above* nature, it muſt be entirely *fantaſtic* and *viſionary*; and we may as well aim at being *Angels*, and raiſing ourſelves, *altogether*, above the fixed rank of being, in which the Almighty Creator has placed us: Since we cannot enjoy the *Happineſs* of ſuperior intelligences, unleſs we are poſſeſs'd of their *capacities*——If, on the other hand, it be *below* nature, we muſt not only debaſe our conceptions and diſhonour our dignity, but loſe juſt ſo many pleaſures for which we were formed, and thoſe the moſt *ſublime* and *refined* of all our pleaſures.——Again, if it be *contrary* to nature, it muſt be *a falſe ſophiſticated* Happineſs, liable to infinite *caſualties* and *interruptions*; and can laſt no longer than the *falſe* appetite, and the *perverſion* of nature continues.——And if it be adapted only to *one part* of our frame, let that part be ſuppoſed *equal* to the other, we are ſtill but *half* happy; and cannot have a *regular* and *full* enjoyment of ourſelves, while we are liable to the inward ſenſe of ſuch a *defect* in our pleaſures, and to feel the uneaſy burden of *other faculties* for

for which we have provided no proper employment, of *other deſires* unſatisfied. SERM. II.

To find out, therefore, what is the *true* nature, what the moſt *ſubſtantial* part, what the *perfection* of Human Happineſs, there needs another inquiry, and that is, "*What ſort* of a being is man?" Why, we know, that he has ſtrong *animal* paſſions; from whence this conſequence directly reſults, that he was "deſigned, "within *certain bounds*, for the enjoyment "of *ſenſitive* pleaſures." We know, that he has *reaſon*; and muſt, therefore, have been "framed for *intellectual* pleaſures." —— We know, likewiſe, that he is capable of *deliberation*, has a *ſenſe* of the *beauty* and *rectitude* of actions, and a *power* to *regulate* his own conduct; and was, therefore, "intended for *moral* plea-"ſures:" —— And that he is a *dependent* being, a member of a *community*, whoſe wants are *general* and their intereſts *inſeparable*, and that he has *native generoſity*, *benevolence*, and *public affections*; and was, therefore, "conſtituted for *ſocial* plea-"ſures." Now to *complete* the *Happineſs*, which infinite wiſdom ordained for man

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SERM. II. in the preſent life, " *all* theſe ſeveral kinds " of pleaſures muſt be allowed to have " their proper *place*, and to furniſh out " their juſt *proportion*." Even the *inferior* are only to be directed and moderated, and kept in their due ſtate of ſubordination, but not to be abſolutely *rejected* as unworthy our regard: For, while we are compounded of *body* and *ſpirit*, to endeavour to be quite *abſtracted* from ſenſe, and *wholly* given up to ſpiritual contemplations and exerciſes, " cannot be *religion*; it " cannot be a *true* purſuit of *Happineſs*; " but is *enthuſiaſtic rigor*, an injury to " *ourſelves*, and a violence offered to *na-* " *ture*." And to preſerve that *beautiful harmony* which the Creator has appointed, a love of retirement, of meditation and converſing with ourſelves, ought not to beget a *reſervedneſs* and *auſterity* of diſpoſitions and manners; nor an intenſeneſs even in acts of devotion to *ſeclude* us from ſociety, and render us inſignificant and uſeleſs *to the world*, while we are *in it*. And with reſpect to *animal* pleaſures this is the *rule*, " that they be always " *conſiſtent* with *thoſe* of reaſon, piety, " juſtice,

" juſtice, fidelity, and mercy; then will " the *ballance* be kept even, and the *end* " of our creation anſwered." The pleaſures ariſing from rational religion, and a ſtrict and generous exerciſe of the ſocial virtues, can never be *irregular*, nor *interfere* with any of the innocent and deſirable delights of ſenſe; they only *regulate*, without *deſtroying* them: So that while *theſe* have the *ſuperiority*, the *natural propriety* and *order* of things is fully maintained. Add to this, that the proper Happineſs of *a man* muſt be denominated from his *nobler* part: " His *ſenſitive* gratifica- " tions muſt therefore be *reaſonable*, or " they are *unnatural*;" unſuitable to his character, and a diſgrace to it. They are in themſelves the imperfection of his *preſent* frame, and an argument of its low and diminutive ſtate: And if there be any nobler and more perfect exiſtence deſigned for him, what the Scripture ſays with reſpect to this *higher ſtation*, which it elegantly ſtiles *the kingdom of God*, is exceedingly probable on the foot of mere natural reaſon, *viz.* that *fleſh and blood* are too *groſs* to enter into it. So that

SERM. II. whoever ſuffers ſenſe to have the aſcendent, and ſupreme influence, is inſenſible of the *honour* of his nature, and fond of that which *humbles* and *degrades* it; and muſt either have *no notion* of any Happineſs beyond what irrational creatures are capable of, or is *deſirous* of none that is more excellent.

THE SECOND rule, to direct us in our *enquiries* after Happineſs, is, to take care that our proſpects and expectations be *juſt* and *reaſonable*. This in general, though it be but a melancholy, is a too juſt account of Human life: "We *forget* the *paſt*, are "*diſcontented* with the *preſent*, and in-"dulge *preſumption* and *fancy* about what "is *future*," inventing ſchemes of Happineſs which we are never likely to effect, and which it is, ſometimes, ſcarce *poſſible* to execute; and, by this means, we make life a perpetual ſcene of *vexation* and *diſappointment*. And thus it will *always* be, if we either expect *more* from the world than it *can* yield us, or amuſe our ſelves with *vain* hopes, that are *above* our rank and condition in it. If a man, in eaſy agreeable circumſtances, cannot be contented

because

becauſe he is not poſſeſſed of an *affluence* of riches; if another, who is reſpected and honoured in his ſtation, is fond of *prehemінence* and *a more conſpicuous* dignity; if a third wants to be furniſh'd with all the trifling *unneceſſaries* of luxurious extravagance —— I can ſee *no way*, notwithſtanding the vaſt munificence of the Maker of the world, how they can *eſcape* being *miſerable*. In order to be happy, therefore, conſider the world *as it is*, and make the *beſt* of it within the bounds of *innocence*: —— Let contentment and reſignation to providence *ſupply* the *imperfection* of mortal pleaſures. —— *Confine* your ſelves, as much as poſſible, within the compaſs of *natural* wants and inclinations —— Take care of a *reſtleſs* deſire of *ſuperfluities* —— Let your Happineſs be *inward* —— Expect not *too much* from the moſt applauded and envied enjoyments; diſcard childiſh *hopes* and *fears*, nor entertain ſchemes againſt *reaſon* and *probability* —— Reſolve to go through life with *integrity* and *honour*, not *diſturbed* with needleſs terrors; but yet *arming* your minds againſt any *changes* that may happen, where the ſcene

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is ſo frequently and ſo unexpectedly ſhifted.

THIRDLY, That alone can be conſidered as the chief and ultimate *Happineſs* of man, which is ſuited to *every* ſituation and character, and to the various unavoidable *viciſſitudes* of Human life. And the only thing, that can boaſt of theſe excellent properties, is *religion* —— For when ſtript of tyrannical *rigors*, and the frightful dreſs of *ſuperſtition*, it is ſo far from being too *ſolemn* and *reſerved* for the ſprightlineſs and gaiety of *youth*, that it renders it amiable; and is the only ſafe and honourable guide through that ſtage of *levity* and *danger*. It approves itſelf likewiſe to the ſedate reflection, and mature judgment, of our *riper years*; and renders *old age* more *venerable*, and ſubmiſſively patient under its infirmities. And, to conclude this head, it *raiſes* the dignity of the great and honourable, and renders their rank and character more *illuſtrious*; and is the only thing that can correct the *inſolence*, and give *a true reliſh* of the pleaſures, of worldly *proſperity*; and naturally tends to inſpire reſolution, and a ſteddy confidence

of

of mind, under adverſe and unfortunate occurrences.

THE two next *rules* are theſe — That is our trueſt Happineſs which is moſt certainly *attainable*, and moſt eaſily *ſecured*; which, in its own nature, is moſt permanent and durable, and *guarded* againſt external accidents —— And that which may be purſued, and enjoyed, without *ſhame* and *anxiety*, without *ſuſpicion* of wrong conduct, or *fear* of future ill conſequences, which will ſtand the teſt of deliberate *reflection*, and improve upon longer *experience*; that will ſupport a calm and ſteddy *ſerenity*, and moſt effectually deliver us from turbulent and diſquieting *paſſions*. Theſe rules are ſo cloſely connected, that they may juſtly be conſidered together, and ſo clear in themſelves, and eaſy to be applied, that they ſcarce want a particular illuſtration. It will be ſufficient therefore to obſerve, that the deſcription here given of *Happineſs* can neither belong to licentious *pleaſures*, nor to the gratifications of *ambition*, nor to amuſements of *vanity*, which depend either on the vigor of the *ſenſes*, or on fancy, cuſtom, humour,

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things infinitely *various* and *always changeing*; which are *impaired* by distemper, render'd *insipid* by age, *interrupted* by sudden revolutions in the state of our affairs, and *entirely lost* in death; and, though they meet with the applauses of a fond devoted *inclination*, have nothing in them so substantially valuable, as to pass the scrutiny of a cool disinterested *judgment*. But the pleasures of *religion* depend upon the rectitude of our minds, and that depends upon our own will, our own choice and resolution; so that they are more in our power than any other branches of our Happiness: And being what the glorious hosts of *Angels*, what *the Son of God* the head and lord of all the armies of heaven, and *the eternal God himself*, chiefly delight in, they must be the worthy object of our *assiduous* and *inflexible* pursuit.

AGAIN, The Happiness which we ultimatly propose should be *uniform*, and not *inconsistent* with itself. All the *branches* of it ought to terminate in *one point*, all the *means* made use of for the attaining it should conspire to *one end*: For if they draw *different* ways, they unhinge and distract

diſtract the mind; the neceſſary effect of which muſt be confuſion and miſery. But thus it is with all criminal and inordinate paſſions. —— Let *pride* and *covetouſneſs*, or *ſenſuality* and *covetouſneſs*, prevail to any conſiderable degree in the ſame perſon (as there are infinite caſes ſuppoſable, in which the impulſes of theſe different paſſions may happen to *interfere*) "they "will of courſe deſtroy even the *natural* "*falſe* pleaſures that *each* might *ſeparately* "afford:" And which ſoever of them is denied its proper gratification, the conflict may be as *arduous* and *painful*, as to *ſubdue* it altogether; though it has nothing of honour, or pleaſure, or proſpect of a reward hereafter to *counterballance* it. Or let us put another caſe, of a man that would make a kind of *compoſition* for his Happineſs, by uniting the two *diſcordant* and *incompatible* principles of vice and virtue. He is a *reſerved* irreſolute ſinner, and obſerves, as it were, a *moderation* in his exceſſes: And becauſe *religion*, or *fear*, may hinder him going the utmoſt lengths in debauchery, he hopes to patch up what may paſs for a good character *upon the*

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whole; and be, if not a title to heaven upon the *ſtrict terms* of the goſpel, and in a judgment of *equity*, at leaſt a recommendation to *mercy*. —— But how is this *inconſiſtency* likely to ſerve his purpoſe? A few particular caſes may occur that may be *exceptions*, but, if we argue from the nature of things, this muſt be the *general* concluſion, —— That his *vices* will always be incroaching, and gaining ground, on *his ſenſe* of virtue; or what there is ſtill remaining, in him, of *natural conſcience* will be *officious* in upbraiding and condemning his evil practices: So that he is unhappy *both* ways; not to mention the *diſtreſs* which he is ſure to meet with in the final reſult of things, and when he is ſummoned to appear before the impartial tribunal of God. The only way left for him, is to be *truly*, i. e. *univerſally*, religious: Then every part of his conduct will have *one tendency*, to the honour of God, and his own rational perfection and felicity. — What are more properly ſtiled the duties of *piety* have evidently this *direction*; ſo has every act of *juſtice*, and every office of *compaſſion* and *generoſity* to our

our fellow-creatures. And even the *regular enjoyment* of ſenſitive pleaſure is an *exerciſe* of reaſon, or, at leaſt, is *in purſuance* of an exerciſe of reaſon: And the ſtrict and conſtant obſervation of the rules of regularity, which *reaſon* dictates, is an acknowledgment of its ſupreme *dignity* and *authority* —— And reaſon being the *eternal law* of God (which revelation has only *revived*, and enforced by a *few* peculiar diſcoveries and inſtitutions) the ſame conduct muſt alſo be an acknowledgment of his *univerſal rule*, and, conſequently, is both *reaſon* and *religion*.

LASTLY, The Happineſs, which we have in view, muſt reſpect *the whole* of our exiſtence. This the common ſenſe of mankind immediately aſſents to, and, if it be at all conſulted, forces upon them this natural and *unalterable* concluſion: That if there be a *future* life, which *reaſon* ſtrongly intimates; if there be *a future immortal* life, which *revelation* expreſly aſſerts; it muſt be moſt *injudicious conduct*, it muſt be ſurpriſing and *extravagant folly*, to make no *proviſion* for our intereſt in it, and,

SERM. II. and, indeed, not to conſider it as our *principal* and moſt *momentous* concern.

HAVING, thus, ſhewn what are the proper *rules* to direct us in our *ſearch* after Happineſs, I proceed to conſider,

SECONDLY, The *reaſon* why ſo great a part of mankind, tho' they are prompted by an ardent and inextinguiſhible inſtinct in nature to purſue Happineſs, *miſs* of their *end.* And it reſolves itſelf, in all its different ſhapes and appearances, ultimately into this, that they expect to derive their *chief* felicity from *carnal* gratifications. This is directly and ſtrongly intimated in theſe words of the *Pſalmiſt*, there be *many* (the multitude, the *generality* of men in almoſt every ſtation) *that ſay, Who will ſhew us any good?* i. e. "Who "will heap *honours* upon us? Who will "point out the way to *wealth* and *luxury?* "Who will preſent new ſcenes of *plea-* "*ſure*, that we may indulge our appetites, "and give full ſcope to the rovings of a "wanton fancy?"——That this was the *ſubſtance* of what was intended by the ſacred

cred writer in this queſtion, the words put in *oppoſition* to it, in which he expreſſes his own wiſer ſentiments, are an undeniable proof, LORD, *lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us:* That what he here ſuggeſts is a fair repreſentation of *fact*, experience loudly teſtifies; that it is a *falſe* notion of *Happineſs* and a *fatal error*, reaſon plainly teaches. For, what are honours? What are riches? What is ſenſual pleaſure?——They are *light* as vanity, *fleeting* as a bubble; *thin* and *unſubſtantial* as air. A high poſt is, in many inſtances, but an *eminence* of *miſery*; honours are continually *ſhifting* from one to another; and the brighteſt ſcenes of human glory are ſo tranſitory, that thoſe, who are the *principal characters*, can many times be compared to nothing more properly than to great *meteors*, which give *a ſudden blaze*, and then loſe all their light in obſcurity. In like manner it frequently happens, that men are pinched with *want*, and feel all the real inconveniencies of *poverty*, in the midſt of the greateſt abundance: And our own *experience* muſt have convinced us, to uſe the

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ſublime and beautiful language of Holy Scripture, that *riches take to themſelves wings, and fly away from their owners.* And as for the pleaſures of *ſenſe*, they are, at beſt, but a ſuperficial flaſh of delight, followed by loſs of appetite, if not by remorſe; but, generally, they are nothing more than a preſent *relief* from the troubleſome and importunate cravings of *violent* and *reſtleſs* deſires.——The ſinner, at the ſame time that he ſeems ſo *gay* and *elate*, ſo *free* and *unreſerved* in his pleaſures, and ſo entirely devoted to his corrupt inclinations, may be ſubſtantially and inexpreſſibly miſerable; and have the ſource and ſpring of his miſery wholly *in himſelf*. And thus "the *inward ſcene*, "which is of the higheſt importance, "and which *alone* denominates and *cha-* "*racterizes* the man, may be a ſcene of "diſtraction, of ſelf-upbraiding, of gloo- "mineſs and horror; while the outward "*glares* with falſe lights, and is a mere "*fallacious* and *unnatural* diſguiſe."

LET me add to all this, that he who places his ſupreme good in animal gratifications (as he is the ſlave of *capricious* and *variable*

variable paſſions) muſt be liable to be *diſguſted* with his very pleaſures; that every entertainment in this low kind of *irrational* life, inſtead of allaying and calming, has a direct tendency to *inflame* thoſe deſires, for which there is *in nature* no *adequate* object: And, therefore, however he may flatter, blind, and impoſe upon himſelf, and expect to find an end of all his ſolicitude, and the full completion of his wiſhes, in indulgences of ſenſe and appetite, he muſt certainly be diſappointed in all his hopes of Happineſs *as a man*. ——It may perhaps be ſaid, that this is, in truth, no diſappointment to him at all, becauſe animal pleaſures are his ultimate end, and he never aſpired after any thing more *high* or *refined*. Allowing this to be the caſe, is he, upon a fair and impartial eſtimate, ever the leſs *unhappy*? Is he *the leſs* unhappy for not *knowing* his Happineſs; *the leſs* unhappy, merely becauſe he is *inſenſible* of his ſhame and miſery? As long as this deluſion continues, he can have no *inclination*, no *motive*, and conſequently, it can ſcarce be truly ſaid that

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that it is in *his power*, even to *endeavour* to be happy. And yet *Happineſs* is what he profeſſes to purſue, and it is for the ſake of this, that he follows the bent and courſe of appetite: So that the concluſion is unavoidable, that he muſt ſuffer *a total* diſappointment with reſpect to the *propoſed* ſcope of all his deſigns and actions, tho' he may neither *ſee* his diſappointment, nor *feel* the *anxiety* and *pain* of a diſappointment. The diſorders of tumultuous paſſions may, in numberleſs caſes, *depreſs* and *obſcure* the *underſtanding*; but they can never *alter*, never *confound*, the fix'd and immutable *differences* of things. "The ſcene, "which vanity and paſſion repreſent, is "generally *fictitious* in a great degree, "*high-wrought* and figur'd *beyond the life*. "A light and diſſolute mind is apt to be "*extravagant* and *unbounded* in its proſ-"pects, and to magnify beyond all the "*proportions* of reaſon, and all the *poſſibi-"lities* of things, as the world is at pre-"ſent conſtituted, its particular and fa-"vorite object. It muſt ſurely then be "an extreme of folly, when its chief "pleaſures

" pleaſures are at the *higheſt* in *fancy*, i.e. " before they actually *exiſt*; and *leaſt* " when they are *real*."

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SOLOMON, therefore, who had ſhone in the height of luxury and ſplendor, had indulged himſelf even in *moſt* of our faſhionable exceſſes, and given large ſcope to his ſenſes and taſte for vanity, upon a review of his conduct diſapproved of, deſpiſed, and ſeverely condemned *the whole* as a ſcene of impertinence and diſquietude. And we know, from the unalterable nature of things, that this muſt be, in ſome degree, the *experience* of every other *ſenſualiſt*; though he has not ingenuity and honour enough to *acknowledge* it, nor perhaps a ſufficient ſhare of reflection to inable him to diſcern it aright, and make the proper *uſe* of it: Nay, though his underſtanding ſhould be ſo wofully weakened and defaced, as to look on *Solomon* as having entirely loſt the *politeneſs* of his taſte, as ſoon as he was recovered to the *juſt* exerciſe of his *reaſon*, to ſobriety and a ſenſe of virtue. Prodigious it is, as well as highly to be deplored, that ſuch *ſtrange* infatuations ſhould prevail amongſt mankind!

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kind! Inconſiſtencies, that one would think no ſtrain of invention, not even *prejudice* and *vice* itſelf, could find out a way to reconcile. And yet, "though the "ſlave of appetite is apt to admire thoſe "inſtances of *ſagacity*, which ſhew like "*ſparks* and *faint glimmerings* of reaſon "in brute creatures, and looks upon them "as marks of *diſtinction* and *ſuperiority* in "the animal race, becauſe they, thereby, "approach *nearer* to the rank of Human "nature; he, at the ſame time, does his "utmoſt to obliterate that *intelligence* and "thoſe excellent *moral* capacities, which "are the chief preheminence of *man*:" He *affects* to *deſpiſe* the chaſte, the ſedate, the ſtrictly virtuous, men of ingenuous thought and ſublime diſpoſitions; and to *value* himſelf for his infamy. And as all this ſprings, principally, from what I have juſt hinted at before, *viz.* from falſe notions of politeneſs (which word ſeems to operate like *a charm* upon the inconſiderate, the gay, the voluptuous) I beg leave to conclude this head with obſerving, that, whatever *accidental* differences may happen, *Human nature* is in *all* the ſame, and *Human*

happineſs

happineſs the ſame; vice, in its own nature, is equally *infamous*, and virtue equally *ſublime* and *beautiful*, under every degree, whether of *politeneſs* or *barbarity*. If, indeed, all our *poliſhings* were applied to what is properly the *manly* part in us, to *adorn* and *enlarge* the underſtanding, and give a more *attractive grace*, or an air of greater *dignity* to our virtues, they would *then* be truly praiſe-worthy and honourable. But if they are confin'd to the *ear*, the *palate*, the *dreſs*, the *equipage* of the man, while his *mind* lies quite uncultivated, or is over-run with ignorance and vice: In this caſe, even thoſe whom we call *ſavages*, provided they have ſincere piety, though mix'd with ſuperſtition, fortitude, equanimity, probity, frugality, continence, generoſity and benevolence of heart; *theſe*, I ſay, upon the ſuppoſition here made " are really *polite* —— And " *we ourſelves* are *barbarous*."

THE LAST thing propoſed was to ſhew, That the favor of God, and his approbation of them as their Governor and Judge, is abſolutely neceſſary to the *Happineſs* of

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Mankind, and of *all* intelligent Beings. But it would be needleſs to attempt a labour'd proof of this propoſition, becauſe, in every age, all who have believed a *Deity* and a *Providence*, have unanimouſly allowed it: And no wonder, ſince it is not a matter of *nice* and *intricate* deduction, but the reaſons of it lie plain and obvious to *all* capacities. To have that great Being for our *enemy*, who has the abſolute command of nature, and is the ſovereign uncontroulable diſpoſer of all events, is the moſt *dreadful idea* that the mind of man can form. No condition can be *ſo* miſerable, as to have infinite wiſdom, power, and even *goodneſs* itſelf, engaged to *puniſh* us, becauſe we have corrupted our high-born nature, and abuſed its excellent capacities. And therefore, when the merciful Governor of the world makes us the objects of his *kind* and *favourable* regard, what higher felicity can we *poſſibly* attain to? What can afford more exalted, ſtrong, and durable ſatisfaction to the mind? The *diſpleaſure* of our Maker includes in it the utmoſt *diſtreſs* and *infamy*; and his *favor* every thing *great*, good, and honour-

honourable. So that the devout prayer of the *Pſalmiſt* will, likewiſe, be the humble and fervent ſupplication of every *wiſe* and *virtuous* man —— *Lord lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.*

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AND the *only* way, in which we can ſecure this ineſtimable privilege, and high honour, is pointed out to us by *Solomon*, at the end of the book of *Eccleſiaſtes*, in theſe words: *Let us hear the concluſion of the whole matter, fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man:* —— "A compendium of his *duty*, and "the ſum of his *happineſs*."

SERMON III.

The Mischiefs of Vanity, and affected Wisdom.

ROM. i. 22.

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.

THE instances of *folly*, which St. *Paul* here charges on the Heathen world, were their gross and stupid idolatries, introduced and established in defiance of some of the first and strongest dictates of reason; by which they had not only limited the *infinite essence*, and debased

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debased the *majesty* of God, but exposed and vilified the *Human nature* itself. To have avoided these scandalous corruptions they had an easy and certain course to follow; which consisted in nothing else, but their being guided by the *original light* of their own minds. For the principles and foundations of true religion were *visibly laid* in *nature*. The existence, unity, eternal power, supreme excellence, and universal dominion of the Deity were, or *might have been*, clearly seen, *being understood by the things that are made*, i. e. by the *stupendous fabric*, and *shining beauty* of the universe. The evidence is always *before* men, and strikes *all* their *senses*; and the reflection on it is *natural*, and, while the faculty of thinking continues, next to *unavoidable*.

HOWEVER, the miserably deluded *Pagan* idolaters made a shift, by their unnatural fictions, and the extravagance of their *low* and *carnal* reasonings, to obscure, and, in a manner, obliterate these glorious truths. *They changed the truth of God into a lye*; or, in other words, in the place of the *real* and *only* God of the universe, substituted

substituted a strange multitude of Deities that were but mere *chimera's*, and the creatures of *fancy:* And stained the honour of that invisible, all-powerful, incorruptible Being, who created, and animates the whole world, by representing him under the image of a *weak*, *passionate*, and *frail* Man, nay, of *inferior baser* animals; of the most *irrational*, *noisome*, and *injurious* animals; a stupid *ox*, voracious *birds*, and foul venemous *reptiles*. But notwithstanding they were thus confused and lost in error, notwithstanding they had pitched on such *emblems* of the amiable and eternal Deity, as had a direct tendency to render him either universally *mean* and *despicable*, or an object of *horror* and *detestation*; and could not have expressed his character with greater *reproach* and *ignominy*, if they had actually designed, with open malice, to defame and insult him; notwithstanding all this, I say, they still *boasted* of their *wisdom*, gloried in the perfection of their several forms of idolatry, and were *madly* incensed against the true doctrine of the *unity* of God, and the abolition of *image-worship*, as *dange-*

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SERM. III. *rous novelties*, as mere extravagance and impious infatuation. And even the greatest part of the *Philosophers* themselves joined in paying the *establish'd* honours to *brute* Deities, and performing offices of religion before senseless and inanimate images; and, by this means, concurr'd with the *vulgar* in the solemn formalities and follies of their *superstition*. Nay, there is this particular and remarkable circumstance to *aggravate* their case, that they openly avowed ,and doubtless invented, sophistical reasonings and subtilties to support the practice of an *outward hypocritical* compliance with the superstition of their country; " a practice evidently absurd to *reason*, because fatal to *integrity* and *honour*, " and a most effectual bar to the *reformation* of mankind in the worst state of " degeneracy." This brief relation of plain and undeniable facts must entirely justify St. *Paul* in the general censure which he passes upon the *Heathen* world ——that *while they knew God* (or had it in *their power* to know him, and *ought* to have discerned him, by a right use of their faculties, in the works of nature) *they*

they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations: Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. SERM. III.

"BUT has this been the case only with "enlightened and bewildered *Heathens?* "with those who were heretofore plung-"ed in idolatry, and wanted those full "discoveries of one God, and of his love-"ly but awful attributes, which the reli-"gion of Christ affords?" We cannot say this——Because instances have been frequent in these latter times, and in Christian countries, of persons who, under the pretence of superior discernment, and a more thorough insight into the just state of things, have learnt to refine away the *common principles* of reason; to start *groundless suppositions*, and urge them as realities; to set aside the most important truths on account of objections, that are entirely founded on the *imperfect comprehension* of the Human mind, and the *narrow scope* of its intellectual powers; and, in short, "to be just as wisely *sceptical*, "as the Heathens of old were wisely *su-*"*perstitious*."——It is indeed impossible, that

SERM. III. that a sincere desire and calm pursuit of wisdom, that a free and impartial exercise of reason, that a diligent and accurate search after truth, should *hurt* any cause that is worth contending for, or *lead* to any absurd opinions that are important and dangerous, because it is always *modest* and *ingenuous*, and, upon subjects of moment, deliberate in *weighing all* circumstances, and cautious and slow in *determining*. We are not therefore to imagine that St. *Paul* intended even *obliquely*, to disparage such a becoming temper and conduct as this; which is, as it were, "religion's *barrier*, and serves to "illustrate its use and excellence." But the vain pretence and formal ostentation of *wisdom*, a concern not for the *substance*, but the *name* only, is of a quite different tendency. "*Professing* to be *wise* has a "closer connection, than is, perhaps, "commonly thought, with *gross folly*." And as this is clearly intimated in the text, and was, very probably, a principal thing in the Apostle's *design*, I shall treat of it distinctly, and at large, in the *various* ways in which it may be the *parent* and

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prop of error: From whence several useful reflections will naturally arise, for the conclusion and application of this discourse. SERM. III.

AND in the way of general observation it must be allowed, "that there is *no* passion attending Human nature, which "blinds and infatuates so *universally*, and "to such an *excessive* degree, as *Pride*." It is attentive only to *itself*, and overlooks *all other* objects. It is a *narrow* passion that contracts the *whole* soul, and does not leave *room enough* for the reception and entertainment of knowledge. Every species of *Pride* produces these effects in some measure; but they appear most eminently, when that particular sort prevails, which may be called, by way of distinction, *the Pride of Wisdom.* —— There are other cases, in which the haughty and arrogant may be brought to think calmly, in which they may *suffer* instruction, and be *convinced* of error; but when they are under the influence of this most inveterate and malignant kind of Pride, they are, for the most part, *absolutely incorrigible.*

THUS, for example, the man that values himself on his *wealth*, "will be "apt

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"apt to deride a wisdom that is *poor* and "*meanly habited*, and not recommended "by the pomp and shew of outward "circumstances:" But though he may think it a disgrace to him to receive information from such as are in a more *indigent* and *servile* life, he may allow those, who are as rich as himself, to have a considerable share of *knowledge* and *experience*, and *improve* by their conversation. In like manner, he that is elate and swoln to high conceptions by *honour* and *worldly grandeur*, "may look down with con-"tempt on the sentiments of the *vulgar*, "and the dictates of common sense;" but may, however, have *one open* passage to his mind, through which men of equal, or superior dignity may communicate *right* notions of things. But if he is vain of his *understanding*, and this is the very *precise point* in which his *Pride* terminates, "it "will make him *hasty*, *unsuspicious*, and "*positive* in his conclusions, and *stubborn* "in error." A man of this unhappy turn will be apt to imagine *all his lights* to be clear and strong. He seldom feels any *defect* in his capacity, or is conscious

of

of *partiality*, or a *wrong method* in his inquiries. He is inclined to trust to his *first* apprehensions as a sufficient guard against error. Every odd start of *fancy* is likely to be magnified as an uncommon and valuable discovery; liveliness of imagination to pass for a quick and penetrating *judgment*, and the *presumptions* of vanity and self-conceit to be mistaken for the *demonstrations* of reason. This is the natural state of a mind that *professes* itself to be *wise*, and claims in this respect a preheminence above others: Let us now descend to particulars, and briefly consider the *various steps*, by which it may be led to extravagant sentiments in the great points of religion.

IN the FIRST place, an arrogant *conceit* and *affectation* of wisdom is always fond of being *distinguished*, and naturally loves *singularity*, in order to be *remarked* for a peculiar character. "In the way of "*common reason*, it might, perhaps, make "*no figure* to engage a particular attention; and, therefore, it must strike out "some *new* discovery, that it may not "be blended with the mass, the herd, of "mankind,

SERM. III. "mankind, and *lost in a crowd.* So that "this desire of *false fame* directly leads "to *absurd* and *odd* opinions; and there "is, indeed, no setting *bounds* to the er-"rors which it may produce." From this principle *alone*, most of the *senseless* paradoxes and *libertine* doctrines, that have ever disturbed and corrupted the world, may be easily accounted for. If a man, with this view of getting fame, and shewing an uncommon genius, stumbles upon the truth, it must be by *chance*, because that was *not* the point he aimed at, but the amusement and gratification of his vanity; which may, therefore, be justly represented, as giving the mind a perverse biass to *licentiousness*, both in sentiment and practice.

BUT farther, the man of *conceited* wisdom will be apt, as experience loudly testifies, to fancy that he can *comprehend* every thing; which not only demonstrates that he has in general a right notion of *nothing at all*, neither of himself, nor of any part of *nature*, but must fix in his mind most dangerous and fatal *prejudices*. For, FIRST, Upon a principle so absolutely

lutely *wrong*, no rational superstructure, no scheme of solid and useful knowledge, can possibly be *raised*. "Truth cannot "be built on *ignorance* as its *foundation*; nor "can any consequences be fairly deduced "from *error*, but what are *equally* erroneous."——Again, he that makes his own limited and shallow comprehension the *standard* and *measure* of truth, has nothing by which to *form* or *correct* his ideas; "nothing to *regulate* his judgment "but itself." And what if his judgment should be *wrong*; must wrong be right, and falshood truth, to flatter his arrogance and self-sufficiency? Or can he be capable of making any *proficiency*, who is thus cramp'd in his inquiries, thus devoted and inslaved to his *present* conceptions? It is not to be supposed. This, however, is not the only inconvenience, that springs from so capital an error. For the same insolent presumption and pride of heart, which makes a person arrogate to himself such enlarged and capacious faculties, will prompt him to *oppose* and *reject* as false, every thing which he finds he *cannot* comprehend, or which he does not *in fact* comprehend,

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comprehend, or has never *thoroughly* considered; and under the influence of this delusion, he will be in danger of renouncing some of the most weighty and beneficial principles of *reason* and sacred dictates of *religion*. Thus, for instance, because he *cannot conceive how* a thinking substance can be intimately united to matter, he may hold himself authorised to dispute at least, if not to deny, the *distinct existence* and *immortality* of the Human soul; because he *knows not how* the several parts of the vastly extended universe of being are preserved and governed, he may imagine himself justified in disowning a *providence*; and having *no distinct* and *adequate* ideas of immensity or eternal duration, he may think it his wisest course to profess himself *an Atheist*.

To which we may add, That he who is puffed up with self-conceit, and affects to show *a depth* of wisdom, will probably think it incumbent upon him to *dispute* almost every thing; and take great pains to blind *himself*, and *confound* others, by *metaphysical* shifts and intricacies. I say *blind himself*, "because reason may be

"*perplexed*

" *perplexed* and *entangled*, and render'd " *incapable* of discharging its proper office, " by an impertinent habit of *cavilling*, " as well as debased and extinguished by " *sensuality* and *lust*." —— The same person is apt to look upon it as a main ingredient in *a wise* man's character, to oppose and deride all *public* principles: And therefore unless all the forms of religion, and the *prevailing* sentiments in *every* age and country, are certainly false, he must subject himself to the fatal necessity of discarding truth and error *promiscuously*; and can have *no rule*, by which to distinguish and separate the one from the other. " *Branches* of the religion of nature, and " the *general principles* of morality, are " blended with *almost* all schemes: So that " by censuring and condemning in the " *gross*, men are ever *sure* to be in the " *wrong* in *many* things, whatever *chance* " they may have, now and then, to be " in the *right* in others."

HAVING given a short account of the methods, by which the pretenders to uncommon wisdom may be misled and turned aside from the truth, let us now see

SERM. III. by what means, it is natural to fear, they will be *confirm'd* and *harden'd* in their opposition to it: And these likewise may be all derived from their *vanity*. —— The errors which a person of this character falls into through rashness, the love of singularity, a supercilious disdain of the fatigue of long and laborious thinking (which is a *disparagement* to men of large minds, of bright and lively parts; and *fit only* for groveling and slow capacities) these errors, I say, can in the nature of things never be rectified, "but by entering on a "*new* course of reflection and examina-"tion, and considering subjects *calmly*, and "in their *full extent*; or by *assistance* "from others." But the former of these his self-conceit will represent as *unnecessary*, and the latter it will probably *despise*. For if, upon the first superficial view, and inaccurate loose survey of a subject, he has taken in the *whole compass* of it, and *digested* it completely, what is the unavoidable consequence? Why, in his opinion, it must be this, that his judgment is *maturely* form'd, and that all farther inquiries are *useless*. To review the subject anew

anew implies a suspicion of his *understanding*, *ingenuity*, or *care*; and not to be steddy and firm in his conclusions, his vanity will represent to him as the discovery of a *weak* and *fluctuating* mind, *tossed too and fro by every wind of doctrine*: And thus all improvements are absolutely *precluded*. When a man flatters himself so grosly, it is hardly possible he should ever *grow wiser*. If his first *rude* notions, of which he is inflexibly tenacious, should happen to be *right*, he must be contented with a small portion, in all likelihood with the *rudiments* and *outlines* of knowledge, and cannot be expected to be a deep proficient, or make any considerable advances. But if his maxims and deductions are *wrong*, so they must *continue*; and there is not the most distant hope of his being recovered out of his beloved ignorance and delusion.

FOR he that *professes* himself to be *wise*, with the spirit of pride and ostentation, will, as was hinted before, entertain very degrading thoughts of the opinions and reasonings of the rest of the world: "So that as he is not likely

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" to find any deliverance from his errors " from *within*, he cuts himself off from " all *foreign* help." — The conceptions of others are trite and unelevated, their ideas gross and confused, their arguments trivial and inconclusive. — This is the genuine *temper* and *language* of pride, the language it has spoke in all ages; it is indeed the very passion itself laid open to public view, and described in legible characters: So that where it happens to be a predominant vice, persons are not likely to be reduced to a true sense of things by the most discreet and judicious instruction. " And whatever *stock* of *wis-* " *dom* there may be in the world, it will " probably be of very little *service* to *them*; " nor can the difference be a great deal, with " respect to any solid advantage which *they* " may derive from it, whether the times in " which they live are *dark* and *barbarous*, " or *ingenuous* and *inquisitive*." For we generally find it to be necessary that we should have some respect for others, in order to our receiving any benefit, any *increase* of *knowledge*, by their conversation. If they are the objects of our *scorn*, their arguments

ments will be so far from having their proper *weight*, that their character, and the light they stand in, will be *too* insignificant even to engage our *attention*. They are condemned in part before they are *heard*; we are not only disposed to a listless and sullen *indifference*, but are, it may be, directly *prejudiced*. And then neither the force of *reason*, nor the charms of *eloquence* will move us: Or, at best, they will make but a faint impression, not *deeply fixed*, and therefore the sooner and the more easily *erased* —— What holds true with respect to *particular characters*, in the common course of life, is the misfortune almost *universally* where the pride of knowledge has taken possession; almost all mankind are treated with a sovereign contempt: And, therefore, there is the utmost probability, that their most wise and generous endeavours will fail of the desired effect to remove such an inwrought and obstinate prejudice, which is mixed and tempered with the very *genius* and *habit* of the mind.

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BUT, besides all this, there is another impediment in the way to prevent *wisdom*

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and *vanity* from uniting, and that is, that self-conceit and *modesty* are at an irreconcileable variance: So that this base and most degenerate vice is *ashamed* of nothing so much, as of what is really most *laudable*, *viz.* of ingenuity in acknowledging *mistakes*; which, in themselves, are not the peculiar dishonour of *any single person*, but spring from the *general imperfection* of Human nature. "A man might, in truth, "be as justly ashamed of *hunger* and "*thirst*, and the whole train of his *sen-* "*sitive* appetites and inclinations, as of "his *liableness* to err. They are *both* the "established constitution of things, de- "termined and unalterable." And, yet, behold the *inconsistency* of a mind captivated and ruled by Pride! "It can bear "to talk without *pain* of a *decaying* frame, "of *brutal* impulses, and all the *glories* of "the understanding *faded*, or *destroyed* "by the sudden violent shock of a dis- "temper;——But the words *error*, *con-* "*fusion* of sentiment, and *partial* views "of things, are hard to be pronounced; "though it be altogether as notorious, "from experience and common observa-

"tion,

"tion, that every man is unavoidably "exposed to *these defects*, as it is that he "has *senses* and *passions*, or that he is "*mortal*." And, indeed, the former naturally result from the *latter*, which are the *true source* of the limitation, darkness, and disorder of our rational faculties. The false shame, which we are now speaking of, has this substantial misery generally attending it, that it extirpates all notion of *sincerity* and sense of *honour*, and renders error *incurable*.——Upon the whole then what *light*, what improvement in substantial *knowledge*, and especially in knowledge of a *religious* or *moral* kind, *can be expected*; and what *absurd extravagant* opinions *may not be* expected, when vanity, and an arrogant pretence and affectation of wisdom, have gained the ascendent? And how natural is it for men, thus *professing themselves to be wise*, not only to become absurd and corrupt in their imaginations, but irreclaimable in their follies? The reflections, suggested by the foregoing discourse, are chiefly these,

FIRST, As one grand instance of *impious folly*, which St. *Paul* has charged on

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the *Heathen* world, was this, that *they changed the glory of the incoruptible God into* images *made like unto corruptible men,* and *irrational animals*; "we cannot, "surely, but think it high time that this "*scandal* was *entirely banished* from *all* "*Christian* churches: And especially from "*Protestant* churches, which have *so-*"*lemnly* renounced the *inventions* of men "as a *standard*, and professed to adhere "to the *Scriptures* (against all arbitrary "incroachments) as their ultimate and "*only* rule."——*To whom will ye liken me?* saith the *holy One.*— *No man hath seen* the *shape* of God, says our blessed Saviour.— "The attempting, therefore, to *describe* "the *invisible* and *immortal* Deity by *lines* "and *figures*, or any *material* emblems, "is a manifest *opposition* to the doctrine "of *revelation*, as well as shocking to the "undepraved *sense of nature.* And the "*immorality* is the more flagrant, because "*material* beings, and such as are per-"ceptible to *sense*, are either wholly *in-*"*animate*, or *mere animals* without rea-"son, or an *inferior*, if not the very "*lowest* order of intelligent creatures."

Isaiah xl. 25.
John i. 18.
Chap. v. 37.

For

For this both *Jews* and *Mahometans* insult us: Who with all their corruptions, and groundless infidelity in other points, "adhere invariably to the acknowledgment "of *one God* and *Father* of all; and abhor the thought of admitting *a partner* "with him in his supreme glory and dominion, and of *debasing* his *spiritual*, "infinite, and incomprehensible essence "by *superstitious pictures* or *images*." SERM. III.

AGAIN, SECONDLY, As all the idolatries and superstitions among the *Gentiles*, before the coming of Christ, proceeded in a great measure from a *vain* and *affected* wisdom, many likewise of the most dangerous innovations, in *Christian* faith and worship, have sprung from the *same* source; from *a professing to be wise* beyond the *standard:* Which in all matters of religion, *purely Christian*, must be the doctrine of *Christ alone*, as it is contained in the writings of the New Testament. This being *wiser* than the *rule* of wisdom has, in many instances, abolished the *plain original truths* of the gospel, to make way for mere *sounds*, empty *forms* and *shadows* of *truth*, and mistaken *metaphysics*; which (though

SERM. III. (though it has not, perhaps, always been directly intended) have had in fact this melancholy effect,——" To foment *end-* " *less contentions*, and expose Christia- " nity to scorn and ridicule." This our very *profession* of the Gospel, and the *religious veneration* which we pretend to have for it, should make us all, in our several stations, strongly concerned to prevent: In order to which, nothing can be a more effectual means, than to check *arrogant presumption* and *self-conceit*; and to improve in ourselves at all times, and recommend to others, that *humble*, *ingenuous*, and *tractable* spirit, which is inseparable from the *love* of truth, and a necessary ingredient in a *wise* and *virtuous* character.

SERMON

SERMON IV.

Of the diſtinct Offices and Uſes of Reaſon and Revelation.

PROV. XX. 27.

The ſpirit of man is *the candle of the* LORD.

BY *the ſpirit of man* we muſt neceſſarily underſtand the intelligent thinking principle, that *naturally* directs to the knowledge of God, and points out the difference of good and evil; and which, according to the manner in which it operates, and the various offices in which it is employed, is ſtiled *underſtanding*, *conſcience*, *will*, *memory* (which

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(which are *all* no other than *the faculty of reason differently exercised:)* And as this is called *the candle of the* LORD, the general observation immediately suggested by the text is, that "*Reason* is a DIVINE light." This is *natural* light; but *Revelation* we acknowledge to be an *extraordinary* light from heaven.—I shall endeavour to shew, in the following discourse, these two are so far from representing things in *opposite* views, and *disagreeing* colours, that they add *a lustre* to each other. And the method I shall proceed in will be to consider,——FIRST, *How far* the province of *Reason* extends: And then to point out the excellencies of *Revelation*, and its *peculiar* advantages. No subject can be of greater importance, in directing and regulating our inquiries after *truth*; and, by not understanding it aright, we shall be in danger of bringing reproach and contempt both on *natural* and *revealed* religion.

IN the FIRST place, then, it is properly and *solely* the business of *Reason* to determine, in general, concerning the *being*, *perfections*, and *providence* of God; those

great

great truths and *first* principles, on which all religion natural and revealed is founded. For when we attempt the *proof* of these from Revelation, we involve ourselves in a maze of insuperable difficulties, in an inextricable labyrinth of darkness and confusion.——We necessarily take it for granted that *there is a God*, when we attempt to prove that any particular scheme of religion is *a Revelation* from God; and yet afterwards go about to establish, what we had before assumed as a *certain* principle, by the words of Revelation. This is the same kind of absurdity, as if a man should set himself to argue the *wisdom* and *goodness* of God, before he was able to prove his *existence*; and then conclude, "that there *must be* such a supreme and "eternal Being, because he had *shewn* "him to be wise and good."——That the omniscient *Father of* our *spirits*, who perfectly understands the *frame* of the Human mind, *can* by an internal illumination convince mankind both of his existence and providential government, seems highly probable. However, as we cannot, without the most *idle* and *frantic* enthu-

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enthusiasm, pretend to such *extraordinary* and *immediate* discoveries, this is not properly *the point in question:* Which must be stated thus, " whether these *important* " *truths* are *capable* of being proved by " the mere testimony of any external Re- " velation? or whether they are *de-* " *ductions* of *Reason*, which every such " Revelation *presupposes?*"

THAT the *latter* of these is really the case, is in a manner self-evident. For the very *pretence* of a Divine Revelation would be *ridiculous*, if there was *no* God: And if the contrary could not be demonstrated by the *mere light* of *nature*, and there was not sufficient ground to believe it on the *common principles* of *Reason*, it must *appear* ridiculous to all mankind. Besides, by what methods could we possibly convince any of the *truth* of *a Revelation*, unless he be already satisfied with respect to this fundamental Article? If we tell him, that he is obliged to receive certain doctrines because *God has revealed them*, the question, which he may naturally be imagined to put to us upon this, is, How we *know* that there *is* a God? Should we re-

 ply,

ply, that we are assured of it because *he himself* has said it, it might immediately be objected, that this is taking the very thing *in debate* for granted: And we must of necessity be bewildered, and forced to give up the cause, if our *Reason* is not capable of suggesting other arguments for it arising from the *nature* of things. Nay, I may proceed one step further, and add to what has been already said, that it is impossible for us to prove, with any good degree of probability, the truth of Revealed Religion, "if we are not capable "of being *previously convinced*, by our "own reflections and reasonings, not only of God's *being* and *government* of the "world, but of the *excellence* and *perfection* of his *moral* character:" Since nothing is more clear and unquestionable than this, that neither *miracles*, nor the *intrinsic goodness* of the doctrine, can be urged as a sufficient evidence; unless we are assured that the Deity is too *just* and *merciful*, to suffer miracles to be wrought by inferior beings to *impose* upon his creatures, and betray them into *dangerous error*; and withal of such consummate *wisdom*, such

SERM. IV. such strict and unspotted *purity*, that no principles but what are *consistent* and *rational*, and calculated to promote *virtue* and *happiness*, can derive their original from *him*.

SHOULD it be said, that the *miracles* which are performed to *attest* the authority of a Revelation, are also strong and undeniable *proofs* of the being and providence of God: I answer, that, "upon "the supposition that *reason* cannot de- "duce these great truths from the *struc-* "*ture* of the universe, and the general "course of *nature*, this may be justly "*questioned*." For *those effects* which are always visible, the *fixed* and *standing* laws of nature, discover at least *equal* wisdom, power, and goodness, as can appear in any miraculous operations we can conceive of. "The *latter* indeed, being *un-* "*usual*, strike more *sensibly*, and make "a deeper *impression*, than the *regular* "and *uniform* appearances of beauty and "grandeur in the universe, which are "constantly before us;" but cannot, if duly considered, give us more *exalted* ideas of the *power* and *skill* of the Agent. The

stopping the *sun* in his daily course (I choose, in this place, to speak in the language of *scripture*, in conformity to *vulgar* prejudices) the *stopping* the *sun*, I say, in his daily course (which is one of the miracles recorded in the Old Testament) cannot in itself be deemed a *greater* operation, than the *lighting up* at first that glorious luminary: Nor is the *restoring* a *dead* person to life more wonderful (though it may *surprise* us more) than the *communicating life* to innumerable kinds of animals, and to various orders of rational beings. So that *no miracles* can fairly be admitted as a demonstration of the *existence* of an eternal mind, the creator and governor of all; if the *fabric* of the world be not, to the universal Reason of men, a much *fuller* demonstration of it: "Which "is of so *complicated* a nature, and con- "tains in it such an infinite *number* and "*diversity* of effects, as must exhibit more "*incontestable proofs* of omnipotence, and "*brighter signatures* of most curious con- "trivance and extensive goodness, than "*all* the extraordinary productions of the "*miraculous* kind that *ever have* happen- "ed,

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SERM. IV. "ed, or which, we have solid ground "to expect, *ever will* happen amongst "men."

BUT allowing that *miracles might be* a convincing proof of God's being and providence, the general argument, which I have been pursuing, cannot in the least be weakened by it; because all that can be inferred from it is, that the *external evidences* of a Revelation are *equally strong* for the first principles of natural religion: And with respect to the argument from *miracles*, as well as those more *numerous* arguments which may be drawn from the *disposition* and *frame* of the visible world, it must still be left to *Reason* to determine, whether they are *sufficient* or *inconclusive*. For it is only by means of our intellectual powers that we can *weigh* the *force* of evidence, or are capable of *conviction*.—So that to take from *Reason* its unquestionable *prerogative* of fixing and ascertaining the being, perfections, and providence of God, not only undermines the *authority*, and derogates from the *honour*, of Revelation; but will be found, in its *consequences*, to subvert the *main articles* of the Religion of

of Nature, which is the *basis* and *foundation* of it; and, of course, to have a direct tendency to harden sceptical and perverted minds in *infidelity* and *atheism*.

AGAIN, SECONDLY, As it is the office of *Reason* to state and determine the fundamental principles of *natural* religion, it must likewise be allowed to judge concerning the essential *marks* and *characters* of a *divine Revelation* in general, and the *evidence* that is necessary to support it: And whether any *particular Revelation answers* to these characters, and brings with it unexceptionable *credentials* of a Divine original. That there *are* some *peculiar* characters, and *discriminating* properties, by which every pretence of Revelation must be *tried*, is as certain, as that there is *an invariable rule*, in all cases of religion and morality, to distinguish betwixt *truth* and *error*. Otherwise we are exposed to *endless* delusions, and can have *no guard* against the most *stupid* enthusiasm.——But *how* shall we know what these characters are, but from our *Reason*, which is the only *faculty* we have to judge by; and without which we

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should be as *blind* and *undiscerning*, as *incapable* of piety, virtue, and moral government, as the very *brute* creatures? Or in *what way* can we be satisfied, whether any particular scheme deserves the name of a *Divine Revelation*, or be an absurd and wicked *imposture*, but by the help of the same *intellectual* light placed in our minds by the great Creator? To say that we are bound to receive all these things *implicitly*, on the *credit* of the Revelation itself, is to *suppose* it a Divine Revelation before we have *proved* it to be such; which can *only* be done by the methods which I have proposed.

BESIDES, if we admit it to determine the *justice* of its claim by its own authority, we lay ourselves open to the artifice and imposition of every bold and confident deceiver, who may be tempted to take the advantage of our *inattention* and *credulity:* And indeed there is no possibility of preventing this mischief, but by frequent exercises of *mature* deliberation and *rational inquiry*. We cannot account, on any other principle but that of standing by, and submitting to, the *decisions* of *Reason*,

Reason, for our *believing* any Revelation at all, or *preferring* one pretended scheme of Revealed Religion to another; for our embracing the Gospel, and rejecting the *Alchoran*.——For *why* do we acknowledge the *Christian* Religion to be true? ——Not, surely, because we were *educated* in the *profession* of it: For this would be as good a plea, in some other parts of the world, for our adhering to *Pagan* superstition; but it is, or *ought* to be, because our *Reason* informs us that it is worthy of God, that its doctrines are consistent and credible, tending to promote universal purity, and excellently adapted to refine and perfect Human nature.—— And *why*, on the other hand, do we reject *Mahometanism*, but "because the same "light of *Reason* shews it to be an imposture; in its *speculative principles* and "*rituals*, a *corrupt medley* of true religion, "and the old *Arabian* superstition:—— "Because it *encourages* the *immoderate* "gratification of sensual appetites; the "*complexion* of its *precepts* being exactly "suited to the *Paradise* it *promises*, which "consists in such *gross* animal pleasures,

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" as are utterly beneath that state of *per-*
" *fection*, to which it must be the *design*
" of genuine unadulterated Religion to
" *raise* mankind:——Because the *author*
" of it was a person infamous for *lust* and
" *ambition*, and consequently not such a
" one, as a man of any consideration can
" imagine that the wisest and best of all
" beings would *employ*, in the great work
" of instructing and reforming an igno-
" rant and degenerate world:—— And,
" finally, because instead of working such
" *numerous*, *public*, and *unquestionable* mi-
" racles, as *Christ* and his *Apostles* per-
" formed in confirmation of the Christian
" doctrine, he propagated his religion by
" those methods of *cruel violence*, which
" are always discouraging, oppressive, and
" injurious to *virtue*, the *proper* support
" of *base views*, the *natural* source of
" *fraud* and *hypocrisy*, and, in a word,
" as *dishonourable* to the God and Father
" of mercies, who delights not in the
" misery and destruction of his creatures;
" as they were contrary to the *frame* of
" the Human mind, whose *convictions*
" cannot be forced by any worldly terrors,

" and

"and to the nature of true religion which "is entirely *free* and *voluntary*."

THIRDLY, It is the business of *Reason* to judge of the *sense* of Revelation, as well as of its intrinsic *excellence* and external *proofs*. There are certain *rules*, absolutely necessary in order to the right understanding the Holy Scriptures, which if we do not carefully observe, we may run into the most monstrous inconsistencies in *opinion*, and absurdities in *practice*. For instance, the immediate *scope* and *design* of the writers must be diligently attended to, and the general *strain* and *tenor* of the Revelation always kept in view: Parallel passages should be consulted and compared, which, as they relate to the same subject, must *illustrate* each other; and such as are of a more obscure or ambiguous nature ought, according to all rules of good interpretation, to be explained by others whose meaning is *express* and *determinate*. And if we neglect these rules, which *Reason* prescribes, our sentiments of Revealed Religion will be confused and indigested: Nay, it must be mere jargon,

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a ſcheme full of darkneſs, and, as to its true ſenſe, *forever unintelligible.*

"THERE is *no medium* between em-
" ploying our rational faculties in examin-
" ing and ſtating the *doctrines* of Reve-
" lation, and being guided wholly by
" ſounds:" If the latter be our caſe, we may be able to *repeat words*, but ſhall *believe nothing*, or believe we know not what. If, for example, we interpret *proverbial* expreſſions *literally*; if we take general rules in their *utmoſt* latitude, without thoſe exceptions and limitations which other parts of ſcripture evidently ſuggeſt, and the nature of the things themſelves requires; if we carry *figures* to their *higheſt flight*, and make no allowances for the ſtrength and boldneſs of phraſe uſual in the *Eaſtern* nations, and *ſtretch* and *torture metaphors* to every point of compariſon, that either a fruitful invention, or a heated fancy, or a low and childiſh apprehenſion may dictate to us; what *enthuſiaſtic* principles, what *wild* extravagancies, may we not build on perverted paſſages of Scripture?——" Againſt com-

" mon *sense* and *experience*, *truth* and *mo-*
" *rality*, and the manifest design of *Scrip-*
" *ture* itself." But all these inconveniences will be easily and certainly avoided, if we take our *understanding* along with us, and make *that* our constant *guide* in consulting and explaining Revelation. What has been hitherto said is not only right in *Reason*, but confirmed by many passages of the New Testament; in which we find an inspired Apostle appealing to the intelligent powers of those to whom he wrote —— *I speak as unto wise men*; judge ye *what I say*. And we are universally exhorted, " *to prove all things*, *to*
" *search the Scriptures*, to *try the spirits*
" *whether they are of God*, to be *ready to*
" give *an answer to every man that asketh*
" us *a* reason *of the hope that is in* us;
" and, to sum up all, to *be children in*
" *malice*, *but in* understanding *men*."

1 Cor. x. 15.
1 Thess. v. 21.
John v. 39.
1 John iv. 1.
1 Pet. iii. 15.
1 Cor. xiv. 20.

To which we may add, that it is Reason *alone* that can set in a clear and distinct view the *excellencies*, peculiar *beauties*, and *uses* of Revelation: For if *this faculty* be not capable of discerning them, and displaying them in their proper light,

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they must be quite insignificant; and as absolutely *lost* with respect to *mankind*, as to beings that are entirely *irrational*.

IN the LAST place, The *light* of *Reason*, which is *a ray* from the eternal source of *intellectual* light and truth, is of such importance, and its *authority* so sacred, that nothing can justly be admitted as a principle of *revealed* Religion, which is repugnant to it. If by Reason we understand in general an *inward judgment rightly* and *exactly* formed (which amounts to much the same, with the *abstract nature* and *truth* of things) it is self-evident that every pretended Revelation, that is inconsistent with *this*, must of necessity be an *imposture*; because the all-wise, most merciful, and unchangeable God can neither *contradict* himself, nor *impose* upon his creatures. "Or if by Reason we mean *every* "*man's private Reason*, even *that* must be, "with respect to him, the ultimate *judge* "of truth." For to say that he is bound to receive any principles, against the *sense* and *apprehensions* of his own mind, is obliging him to an *impossibility*, viz. to *allow* that to be true, which at the same time he *believes*

to be false. *All* that is advanced against the *use* of *Reason* in matters of Religion, and to demonstrate its weakness and corruption, is an *appeal* to it; *every* argument that is offered for setting up *other* more authoritative decisions of right or wrong, *other* measures of truth and falshood, supposes it qualified for deciding this grand question "—— What is the *ultimate* standard in "all cases of this kind? And if it has "*ability* to determine this fundamental "point on which *all* depends, it may, "surely, be *permitted* to judge in other "instances; especially in points of far less "consequence to the general cause of "virtue and piety, to the present and fu-"ture happiness of mankind." But if *Reason* has so large a compass, and such an extended authority — what is become of the excellency of *Revelation*; and where are all its boasted advantages? Is it not rendered in a great degree insignificant? A little reflection will convince us of the contrary: For,

FIRST, notwithstanding all that has been said, the *expediency* of a Revelation is most evident, and its *uses* are vastly great and considerable. We can scarce, indeed, suppose,

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ſuppoſe, that there are any truths of the *firſt* rank, and of *univerſal* moment with reſpect to the happineſs of mankind, but what reaſon, if duly cultivated, *might* have diſcovered. And yet there are *few* even of *theſe*, which the reaſon of *every man* has actually diſcovered; and ſcarce *any*, but what prejudice, vice, and ſuperſtition have, in almoſt all ages of the world, perverted and darkened. Again, let *doctrines*, and *rules* of life, be in themſelves ever ſo plain to an attentive and inquiring mind, yet we know from experience that they *may be*, we find in fact that they too commonly *are*, *miſrepreſented*, *diſfigured*, *changed*, and *loſt*, through the unhappy influence of wrong education and cuſtom, through indolent ſuperficial thinking, through pride and ſtubborneſs of mind, and the force of many other irregular paſſions and habits; which are the *natural ſource* of error. — And what now is *fit* and *proper* to be done, in ſuch a circumſtance of general and dark deluſion? " Muſt the benighted under-" ſtanding be left entirely to itſelf, to ſtrike " out ſome *new* and *better* light? Is there " no other *wiſe* remedy, for the cure of " this evil, than the *mere chance*, fre-

" quently

"quently against strong probabilities to "the contrary, that the irregular and de-"praved judgment may, one time or "other, *rectify* and *reform* itself? Does "the making use of *instruction*, with re-"spect to those who are out of the way, "derogate in the least from the natural "*dignity* and *strength* of reason? When "mankind are *actually* abandoned to ido-"latry, and over-run with barbarity and "ignorance, are they to be given up as "*irreclaimable*, and denied all *helps* to "inform their understandings and remove "their prejudices? Are communications "of knowledge, in points of the highest "importance, ever the less *useful* merely "because reason, if *rightly exercised*, might "have suggested just notions of religion "and moral conduct?" Has it not been allowed, in all ages, to be of signal *advantage* in the world to reform public corruptions and superstitions? Are not those, who have been engaged in this great work, treated with distinguished *honour*? Nay, "Is not "this the very *pretence* of the opposers of "the Christian Revelation, and what they "themselves are apt to *boast* of (far from

"deeming

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" deeming it an impertinent *officiousness*, or " an *insult* on the understandings of men) " as a most generous and laudable at- " tempt? —— But if it be wise and fit in " itself, can it be unfit, can it be unwise, in " *God*? If the expediency of *Human in-* " *structions* be acknowledged, can *Divine* " *Revelations* be unnecessary? Can the " wisdom, the goodness, the compassion " be *less*, where the advantages are *greater*, " and the condescension is *infinitely* great- " er?" This, surely, is a most *fantastical* method of reasoning, which overturns *all* principles, and shows the force of prejudice to extinguish *common sense*.

FOR the plain truth of the case is this: That as a man *externally* blind most evidently stands in need of the *direction* and *guidance* of those who have the use of sight; so a darkened *understanding* wants and requires *instruction*. And as it would be extremely *ridiculous* if, in the former instance, we should think it necessary to inquire, " whether the man was *naturally* blind, " or *accidentally* blind? and especially, if " he himself should *refuse* to grant the " assistance and care of others to be a great

" *conve-*

"*convenience* and *advantage* to him, be-
"cause he had *originally* the use of his
"*eyes*, and might still have injoyed it *en-*
"*tire*, had it not been for his own viciousf-
"ness and voluntary indiscretion:" As this, I say, would be extremely *ridiculous*; so is it little less *absurd* to confound ourselves by vain and subtil disquisitions, whether the intellectual blindness of mankind proceeded from an *original defect* in their *faculties*, or from *later* and more *remote* causes, in order to judge aright concerning the *expedience* and *usefulness* of Divine Revelation. There is indeed some *difference* in the two cases which have been now represented, but it is by no means sufficient to destroy the weight of the general *argument*, which I have drawn from the comparison. For though a recovery, when the *inward sense* is perverted, may not be absolutely *impossible*, as that of the sight of the *bodily eye* sometimes is; it may, however, be to the last degree *unlikely* without extraordinary means.—— Prejudices may be next to *invincible*—— Errors deeply *rivetted* and strongly *supported*— The utmost efforts of Human reason, to reform

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form epidemical vices and abſurd opinions, may upon *trial* be found *uſeleſs* and *unſucceſsful* —— There may be no probable proſpect of any *ſurer* and more *effectual* method to anſwer this deſirable end: And the *hiſtory* of mankind, with reſpect to religion and the knowledge and worſhip of the ſupreme eternal Deity (at the time when *Chriſtianity* was firſt made known) anſwers in a great meaſure to the foregoing deſcription. —— "*Juſt* notions "of God were, in general, *eraſed* from "the minds of men. His *worſhip* was "debaſed and polluted; and ſcarce any "*traces* could be diſcerned of the ge-"nuine and immutable religion of na-"ture. A degenerate and *barbarous* ſu-"perſtition obſtructed and clouded even "the ſenſe of *morality*, and the *ſocial* "*virtues*. The *aids* and *refinements* of "philoſophy were either *never* applied to "this grand ſource of error and deprava-"tion of manners; or were applied in "vain." And in ſuch a diſordered and almoſt *incurably* bad ſtate of things, to deny the *irradiations* of Divine light to be of eminent advantage, and a remarkable

inſtance

instance of wise and gracious condescension, is a surprizing instance of *folly* and *ingratitude*. But further,

SECONDLY, A Revelation may not only be useful in *rectifying* corrupt principles, and *establishing* right ones upon a better foot of probability; but may also afford *sufficient evidence* to induce us to believe what we could never have *expected*, or might, *perhaps*, have thought *improbable*, nay, some points not *at all discoverable* by natural reason; but yet of signal consequence as *motives*, powerfully and universally exciting, to a regular and inflexible course of virtue. This will fully appear by two instances—the general *resurrection*; and the *eternity* of future rewards: Concerning the *first* of which *reason* is entirely *silent*, and gives *no* intimation; and as to the *latter*, though it may *conjecture* and *presume*, and amuse with pleasing *expectations*, it has no principles on which to proceed in forming *a certain conclusion*. So that a Revelation may revive the *attention* to *moral* truths, that had been for a long time obliterated, and lost amidst a confusion of errors; it may give

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a *sanction* to *other* doctrines, which, though not *repugnant* to, were however *undiscoverable* by mere natural Reason; and make even *important* principles, which to Reason are obscure and doubtful, *clear* and *unquestionable*.

UPON the whole, we learn, from what hath been said, what little foundation there is for setting *Faith* and *Reason* at *variance*, and making them oppose, and clash with each other; "since all faith, that "does not spring from a blind and wild "*enthusiasm*, is *an exercise* of Reason, *a* "*free ingenuous exercise* of Reason:" And to suppose the contrary is disgracing and subverting *Christianity*. The *arguments*, or *grounds*, on which we believe revealed religion, are indeed some *extraordinary facts* that happened out of the common course of *nature*; "but the *process* in judg-"ing of the *credibility* of these facts, and "how far they are an *evidence* of the "truth of the Revelation, is conducted "and carried on by the *understanding*, as "in all other subjects of *rational* inquiry." The representing Faith and Reason as *inconsistent* principles is the *root* of infinite

error

error and superstition: It is the grand *engine* which supports that heap of folly, contradiction, and impiety, that passes under the name of *religion* in *Popish* countries. And as we have been *alarmed* of late from all quarters, as if this senseless and oppressive *superstition* was gaining ground amongst us (which every friend of *virtue*, every lover of his *country*, should be solicitous to prevent) I can think of recommending nothing as more proper to put a stop to so fatal an evil, " than that we " encourage the use of *Reason* in religion, " and make our *Protestantism* consistent; " and do not endeavour, by *disgracing* " Human Reason, to impose upon the " people incomprehensible *mysteries*, and " doctrines that cannot stand *an impar-* " *tial examination:*" For these are the very *same arts*, by which *Popery* itself was first established, and rose, by degrees, to its utmost height of extravagance and barbarity —— The light of Reason will *dispel* all such clouds of error; but if that be industriously stifled and extinguished, men must be liable to be *practised upon* by every crafty insinuating impostor, and

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will be easily *seduced* from their religion. —— I shall conclude with observing, that the more of *Reason* we see in our religion, the more shall we be disposed to practise it; when it appears not to be enjoined by a mere *arbitrary* authority, but to be most excellent in itself, and conducive to our happiness. And as our *obligations* are stronger, chearfully to follow the rules which it prescribes, our *guilt*, if we contradict its precepts by a dissolute and vicious life, must be more black and aggravated. —— *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy*, and *acceptable to God*: For this is *your* REASONABLE *service*.

Rom. xii. 1.

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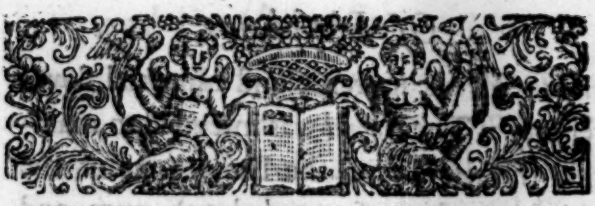

SERMON V.

Of Blaſphemy, and Prophane Swearing.

EXODUS XX. 7.

Thou ſhall not take the name of the LORD *thy God in vain: For the* LORD *will not* hold *him guiltleſs, that taketh his name in vain.*

THE *firſt* commandment was deſigned to enforce the belief and acknowledgment of the *unity* of God, that fundamental principle of all religion; and to ſecure from all *diminution*, and impious *invaſion*, the unalienable

SERM. V. rights of his supreme and universal Sovereignty: The *second* was intended to maintain the *worship* of the Deity (one of the chief branches of *moral* duty) pure and unadulterate, according to the primitive laws of reason and nature; that gross, unrefined, and unworthy apprehensions of him might not, by introducing *idolatry*, obliterate *real piety*, and make *religion* an enemy to *virtue*: But the *third*, which is the subject of the present discourse, has no immediate relation to idolaters; on the contrary, it supposes a *professed belief* of one only LORD, the Governor and Judge of mankind; to whom they are ultimately accountable, and from whose *tribunal* there is no *appeal*. And the direct view of it was, to impress on the minds of men such an awful sense of his perfections and providence, as should, at once, be a motive to the exercise of universal virtue, and subserve the *wise* and *useful* purposes for which *civil government* was instituted.

THE precept itself, in the opinion of many great expositors, might have been better translated thus: *Thou shalt not take up the name of the* LORD *thy God* falsely, " or

"or make use of it by way of *appeal* to "him as *omniscient*, and to whom be- "longs the *final decision* in all cases of "equity, in attestation and support of a "*falshood*." The *Psalmist* therefore joins these two phrases together, in his description of a religious and upright man; that *he hath not lift up his soul to* vanity, *nor swoorn* deceitfully. And, indeed, for the same general reason, that *false* Gods are stiled *vanities*, or *vain* Gods; *vain* Oaths may signify the same as *false* Oaths. This is most evidently the language of *Scripture*, and agreeable to every sentiment of *right reason*. And it is very probable, that our blessed Saviour (who had before referred *distinctly* to *other* precepts of the Decalogue) had an immediate regard to *this* particular precept in these words: *Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, thou shalt not* forswear *thy self, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine* Oaths.

Psal. xxiv. 4.

Matth. v. 33.

THE FIRST and principal thing therefore, that, we may reasonably suppose, is forbidden by the third commandment, is

SERM. V. *Perjury*; a crime so repugnant to all the ideas that mankind have ever formed of *God*, and so utterly subversive of *public order*, that it has been held in the utmost abhorrence, and branded with signal infamy; in *every age* and *nation*. The true nature of an *Oath* is this: An *appeal* to God as the *supreme judge* of equity, in all controversies about right and wrong, as the friend and *patron* of the *injured*, and the severe *punisher* of the *injurious*; it is an *appeal* to his infinite knowledge as a witness to our integrity, and an *imprecation* of his just and heavy vengeance upon ourselves, if we are knowingly and deliberately *insincere*. The man, therefore, who swears positively to *a falshood*, or takes an Oath which he is determined to *violate*, or who, upon any temptation, *recedes* from what he has solemnly and *warrantably* sworn, must not only be entirely destitute of the *least* spark, and most *languid* impression, of religion; but, if he is not a *speculative Atheist*, must act in direct *contempt* and *defiance* of God. He must be a downright *monster* in nature, deriding the *justice* of the Deity, and challenging *Omnipotence*

potence to do its worſt. And moreover, the crime of Perjury may not only be attended, in *particular* caſes, with extremely injurious conſequences; but as *Oaths* have, in almoſt all communities, the *laſt determination* in points of ſocial juſtice, whether reſpecting *life* or *property*, and are the principal *fences* of government itſelf, beſides introducing preſent and temporary inconveniencies, it manifeſtly tends to the overthrow of all right, and to the confuſion and total diſſolution of all civil ſocieties. So that there is no poſſible *villainy*, but what we may fairly ſuppoſe the *perjured* to be *capable* of committing without remorſe: (Or what thoſe, who ſwallow Oaths without *conſideration*, or allow themſelves to frame *equivocations* and *mental reſerves*, are not *preparing* themſelves for the commiſſion of) becauſe they neither *fear God*, nor *regard man*, and are abſolutely diveſted of all ſentiments that are either *generous*, *virtuous*, or *humane*.

VERY near a-kin to this moſt abominable crime, is, in the SECOND place, the binding

SERM. V. binding ourselves by an *Oath* to perform things that are *in their own nature* immoral; or to adhere strictly and inviolably to any *engagements* and *confederacies*, which, in themselves, are unlawful and criminal.

THIRDLY, Every rash and indeliberate Oath, and especially the habit of wanton Swearing in common conversation, falls very naturally within the *scope* of the prohibition contained in the text: And, accordingly, Christ himself has expressly included it in the *just* and *rational* explication of this commandment. This alone could be the intention of these words, *Swear not at all*, and not to represent *all* Oaths as absolutely *unlawful* among *Christians*; because (to assign, at present, no *other* reasons) he himself answered upon *Oath*, when he was, long after the delivery of this divine discourse, *adjured* by the High Priest. And as the vice last-mentioned (to the disgrace of *religion*, and the shame of *Human nature)* is become an *epidemical* and fashionable *extravagance*, it of consequence demands a particular attention, and to be treated of and *censured* more at large.

Matth. v. 34.

Mat. xxvi. 63, 64.

I WOULD

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I WOULD therefore obſerve, in the FIRST place, that it is an act of groſs *impiety*. I take it for granted, that we *all* believe the being of a God; "becauſe if "we are *Atheiſts*, this practice upon our "own principles, or rather *want* of prin-"ciples, will only be *impertinent*, but not "*impious*:" But if we are firmly convinced of the *exiſtence* of an eternal firſt cauſe, who made and ſupports the vaſt fabric of the univerſe; if we are convinced that his *greatneſs* tranſcends all our ideas, that his *dominion* is immenſe, his *power* abſolute and uncontroulable, his *wiſdom* boundleſs and unſearchable, that *all nature* is ſubject to his controul, and ſubſiſts only by his invigorating influence, and that our own *happineſs* and *miſery*, nay, our very *being*, are entirely at his diſpoſal: If, I ſay, we *acknowledge* theſe plain dictates of reaſon, we ought always to entertain the moſt *grand* and *elevated* thoughts of God's ſupreme glory and majeſty. This is but a decent reſpect to ſo perfect and exalted a character; it is no more than treating it with *common propriety*: Which, if there be any *regard* at all due to *cha-*

racters,

SERM. V. *racters*, in proportion to their *dignity* and *merit* (a truth that is as plain as the *distinction* of *colours* and *sounds)* must be a necessary and indispensable obligation. Now from hence it follows, "that whatever directly tends to *lessen* that profound and "humble reverence, which *all creatures* "owe to the universal Creator, must be "highly *criminal*," since no more heinous or *unnatural* an offence can be imagined, than to offer indignity to that most *lovely* and *glorious* Being, who has a rational and just claim to our utmost affection and esteem.

AND that this is the natural tendency of the vice, which I am now arguing against, will be evident on a very little reflection. For it is an obvious and certain truth, "that things of the greatest importance "and use, by being *common* and *familiar*, "grow to be *less* regarded: Things of "the highest estimation, by being *mixed* "with *low images*, are debased and ren-"dered despicable." If therefore we take the liberty to mention the sacred and venerable *name* of God on every *frivolous* and *slight* occasion, it is no wonder if it becomes

becomes a name of very little *solemnity* and *weight* with us; or if this *rashness* and *levity* of temper settle, at length, into an *habitual disregard.* On the contrary, it would be against the *course* of *nature*, in *all* other cases, should it happen otherwise. A *due* reverence and veneration of God can *only* be maintained, by cultivating in our minds *a constant sense* of the infinite distance between him and us, *a sense* of his incomprehensible majesty and spotless perfection, and of our own *comparative* meanness and insignificance: But it must in the end be *quite* destroyed, if we *accustom* ourselves to imprecate his displeasure, and appeal to him without having *any meaning*, in our *loosest* and *vainest* conversations; and, in short, "take *such* "*freedoms* with the *Almighty Sovereign* of "the world, as are not justifiable towards "*one of our own species*, unless he be *un-*"*questionably* our *inferior.*"

BUT this is not all: For this *corrupt* and *impious* practice has not only a tendency to weaken the regards due to our Maker, but is, itself, an instance of the grossest *irreverence* and *contempt* of him.

For

SERM. V. For what can be a more *manifest token* of disrepect, " than to use that tremendous " *name*, which all the hosts of heaven, " beings of the highest order of intelli- " gence, *adore* and *venerate*, to *embellish* " idle discourse, and give an *air* and *co-* " *lour* to our impertinence?" What a daring affront is it to the immaculate *purity* of God, to invoke him in the very scenes of our *lewdness* and *debauchery?* Or how, almost, is it possible for us to express a more *diminutive* opinion of his wisdom, justice, and veracity, than by appealing to him as a witness to the truth of *known* and *deliberate falshood?* " If this be not " done in a court of *judicature*, it still " retains the nature of *Perjury*, though " the effects, *as to the public*, may not " be the same. If it be done for our " *amusement* aud *diversion* only, without " any intention to *hurt* our neighbour, " even then the very *best* that can be said " for us is, that we make *a jest* of *God*, " and introduce him as *the principal cha-* " *racter* in *a farce*; and that we treat *his* " displeasure, as a thing that may be " *sported* with, *who* can make both hea-

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"ven and earth to tremble." But surely this ought not to be allowed, if there be any moral *order*, any *fitness* or *propriety* of conduct, any *connection* between just action, and the nature of things; for it is directly contrary to *all these:* It must, therefore, if there be any universal *rule*, any *standard* at all, by which to judge of good and evil, be in itself absolutely, and *always*, immoral; and an act of *plain* and *flagrant immorality*. And one might reasonably expect that it would shock the temper of a man *(retaining* only general notions of *decency*, and but *slightly* influenced by motives of *religion)* to think, that he has *abused* the *greatest name* in the universe, and the name of one to whom he is under *infinite obligations*, with such insufferable *wantonness* and *insolence*.

BUT besides the *impiety* of *Swearing* by the name of God in our *common* discourse, and on the most *trivial* occasions, it is likewise, in its *consequences*, very detrimental to *society*. This follows in part from what has been already said: "For "a strict regard to the *authority* of God, "and

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"and *an awe* of his supreme grandeur "and dominion, *inforces* the observation "of Human laws: Whatever, therefore, "*lessens* this regard, must *proportionably* "*weaken* the strength, and *reduce* the "flourishing state of societies, by taking "away one great *security* of the *civil* "*rights* of mankind."

BUT the point which I shall principally illustrate, in order to prove this beyond all contradiction, is, that the vice, which I am now exposing, has a visible tendency to *impair*, and by a gradual process quite *extinguish*, our *sense* of the sacredness and inviolable obligation of an *Oath*; with which the support of *government*, the quiet enjoyment of *property*, and the most valuable branches of *social happiness*, are inseperably connected. It is impossible, that while we allow ourselves to *trifle* with *Oaths* in the general course of our behaviour, we should respect them, considered in their own nature, as matters of *any great importance*; or that if we looked upon them as holy ties, and inviolable, we should make it *our practice* to swear to what we never intended

tended to perform, or to the truth of what we knew to be falſe. The neceſſary tendency of ſuch a raſh proceeding is to render Oaths *cheap* and *contemptible*, by *diminiſhing* the awe of God as our impartial judge, and the ſevere avenger of deceit and prevarication. And if we conſider the matter thoroughly and ſeriouſly, I am perſwaded we ſhall be able to aſſign no good reaſon, " why a perſon, who has " *habituated* himſelf to *vain* Swearing, " ſhould not, on *a ſtrong motive* of pri- " vate intereſt, proceed to *deliberate falſe* " Swearing; or why he, who makes no " ſcruple *to call God to witneſs* (when he " is only in *jeſt*) in *common converſation*, " ſhould not think it *as lawful*, when " ſome very conſiderable *temptation* pre- " ſents itſelf, to do *the ſame* in *a court of* " *judicature?*" The *fear* of civil puniſhment, or a *tenderneſs* for his neighbours rights, may perhaps have *ſome* weight with him; but the *religious authority* of an *Oath*, which he has been accuſtomed to treat as a trifling ludicrous thing, cannot be ſuppoſed, in ſuch caſes as theſe, to have any powerful influence: So that men

 being

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being entirely left to their *natural notions* of justice, and the *restraint* of Human laws, (which, if there be no *fear* of a supreme Governour and Judge, will be too easily overborn by a prospect of unlawful gain) they must, of consequence, be *more prepared* for acts of *Perjury:* "Which could "not have abounded so much amongst "us, if the *solemnity* of an Oath had "been carefully maintained, and not pro-"stituted and debased by *vulgar use.*" And nothing more can be necessary to prove the *heinousness* of *this vice*, than the having clearly shewn that it leads to the commission of *another crime*, which renders the *security* of government, the *allegiance* due to princes, and the *possessions*, *characters*, and *lives* of their subjects, quite uncertain and precarious.

AND now, upon weighing the matter calmly, every one would imagine, that, to induce men to commit a crime of so *foul* an aspect to all who are not seasoned and hardened to the practice of it, there must be some very considerable *temptation:* And nothing can be more surprising than to find, "that there is neither a *peculiar* "founda-

" foundation for it in *nature*, or the *de-* " *ſire* of *ſenſitive* gratification, or an irre- " gular private *intereſt*; but that 'tis mere " *unaccountable* extravagance, ſupported " by *cuſtom* againſt *religion*, *ſenſe*, and *de-* " *cency*. The *proud* or *paſſionate* may plead " a *propenſity*, or *particular biaſs* in their " complexion, to the vices which they " reſpectively indulge; but this vice ſprings " from no *conſtitutional inſtinct*; it is en- " tirely of *foreign* extract, the product of " *vanity* and *impertinence*." If natural *heat* and *impetuoſity* of temper be aſſigned as the ſource of it; I anſwer, " that there " are many *other ways* of venting exceſſive " paſſion equally *terrible*, and withal more " *adapted* to the nature of it; ſo that it " is only the *force* of *habit* that has di- " rected it into this channel, which men " would never have *thought of*, if they " had not *before* diſcarded all reverence of " God, and concern about religion." Beſides, there can be no peculiar ſatisfaction, but to a *prophane vitiated* fancy, in the *words* that compoſe an oath, nor in thoſe of a vile *execration*. —— And as for the *advantages*, directly reſulting from this

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vice, what are they? Why, it renders a man's character *suspected*, and frequently lessens the *confidence* that would otherwise be reposed in him; " scarce any are so " thoroughly degenerate, as really to *esteem* " him for it, but many *despise* him." So that it is very astonishing that this *odd* custom, the *folly* of which is equal to its *wickedness*, should even make its way in the world, and much more that it should become *a fashion*, and an infection which has spread itself amongst all *degrees* and *orders* of men, " since it is neither *reason* nor " *ornament* in discourse, neither an argu- " ment of *wit* or *gallantry*, and has nor " *pleasure* nor *profit* attending it, nor any " *original passion* in Human nature direct- " ly exciting and prompting to it; but, " on the contrary, is a reproach to us as " *men*, as *good members* of society, as *pre-* " *tenders* to virtue, *unbecoming* every wor- " thy and honourable character we can " form an idea of, and, in short, is one " of the most *senseless*, *unnatural*, and *use-* " *less* vices that was ever invented. Most " *strange* indeed it is, that a man should " be so *industriously* wicked; and run all

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" the *hazard* of it to his immortal ſoul " hereafter, only to make *his converſa-* " *tion ridiculous.*"

AGAIN, common *Swearing*, and vain prophane *Curſing*, are *mean low* vices, that juſtly expoſe the offender to contempt. They " require *no talents* in order to make " a proficiency in them, but may be " practiſed, in their utmoſt *extent* of im- " piety and guilt, where there are the " moſt *deſpicable* natural abilities, and *no* " improvements of art. They are vices " in which the *meaneſt* of the people ri- " val the *greateſt*; ſo that there is no *di-* " *ſtinction* in them, they do not ſhew a " man's *rank*, not ſet him at all in a *con-* " *ſpicuous* and *ſingular* point of view. And " finally, they are *rude unmannerly* vices." For all the rules of *civility* and *genteel behaviour* are ſtrong againſt a practice, which is eſteemed *infamous* by ſome in almoſt all companies that we frequent. Men of true piety univerſally *proteſt* againſt it; " and " what reaſon is there, that they ſhould " be *liable* to receive perpetual inſults from " *rakes* and *libertines?*" It is undeniably a *clowniſh* behaviour (let the *external rank*

SERM. V. and *empty title* of the *blasphemer* be what it will, it is still the behaviour of a *clown*, *compleatly* ill-bred) to treat with a contemptuous familiarity the *greatest* and *best* of Beings, in the presence of *any* who have a high veneration of him. Every one would naturally *resent* what he thought to be an indignity offered to his *father* or *friend*; and it must give, at least, equal *uneasiness* to a *virtuous* mind, to hear the *Father* of the rational universe, and his constant benefactor, treated disrespectfully: Upon which account such a conduct must be absolutely *savage*, and *inconsistent* with all just notions of *politeness*. "All which "considerations, I would hope, may in-"cline persons of any *refinement*, and of "*generous* tempers, to *reform* their con-"versation in this particular; even though "they have not (which were infinitely "more to be desired) so much *religion*, "as to be restrained by a reverence of "God, and a dread of his displeasure."

AND now having largely proved the unreasonableness, *infamy*, and evil consequences of *rash* and *customary* Swearing, and

and imprecating the vengeance of the Almighty either upon ourſelves or others (both which fall very naturally within the prohibition contained in the third commandment, of *taking the name of the* LORD *our God in vain)* I ſhall conclude this part of my diſcourſe with examining, briefly, the weight of the ſeveral excuſes which are made for theſe *ſcandalous* and *horrid* vices. And here I ſhall not inſiſt on that *poor* plea, that they are an imbelliſhment and grace to our diſcourſe; becauſe it is *ſo plain* "that *Oaths* and *Curſes* are gene-"rally mere bluſtering *expletives*, which "diſturb the ſenſe of a converſation, and "render it harſh and ungrateful; that "they who look upon them to be real "*ornaments* muſt be *incorrigible in their* "*ſtupidity*, and are not *fit to be reaſoned* "*with*." It is ſufficient, likewiſe, juſt to mention another excuſe equally *abſurd* and *frivolous*, viz. that they ſerve to fill up *blank ſpaces*, and ſo are *a help* to the weakneſs of the ſpeaker's underſtanding, and *ſupply*, in ſome meaſure, the poverty of his invention: "For why ſhould per-"ſons, who have no inward furniture,

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" affect to be *talkers*, when *nature* has di-
" rected them to be *silent?* And how
" monstrous is it, to offer this in vindi-
" cation of a *flagrant* act of *impiety*, that
" it was necessary to enable some men to
" *converse to no purpose*, and utter their
" *crude*, *trite*, and *indigested* notions that
" are of no service to the world, but
" ought rather, in wisdom, to have been
" altogether *suppressed?*" Nor will it be necessary to enlarge much more on the pretence, that these vices shew *courage* and height of *spirit*; because that is best discovered by *brave* and *generous* actions: " And it certainly argues *want* of *resolu-*
" *tion*, a *timid*, *slavish*, *impotent* mind," to be prevailed upon to condescend to *sinful* compliances, either to please *particular companies*, give ourselves *fashionable airs*, or serve any purposes of vanity, popularity, or secular *interest*. No man demonstrates such *true* courage, as he that *despises* all usages, however *authoritative*, and universally *prevailing*, which oppose *religion* and *common sense*. Such a one has not only *singular merit* in himself, but will probably be respected and honour-

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ed even by those, who are too *base* and *poor-spirited* to imitate his noble example: And to urge *custom*, against points of *morality*, is to set up the follies and extravagancies of men, against the infinite wisdom of God, and the immutable laws of nature. Should the licentious and prophane person plead, farther, *sudden* and *violent* passion *transporting* him beyond the due command of himself; or else *strength* of *habit*; neither will be a particular excuse for *these*, more than for *any other* immoralities. Let us therefore apply it to other crimes that have a more *startling sound*, and are branded with more *universal infamy*: "Let the *adulterer*, for instance, and the "*murderer* plead, the one the *irresistible* "force of *hasty* rage and passion, the other "the *over-bearing* influence of *imperious* "habits, it will be immediately replied "to *each*: It was thy *duty* to have *cured* "these excesses of passion, to have *reformed* "these irregular and mischievous habits; and to urge *habit* in mitigation "of a bad action is making use of that "very circumstance, which is an *aggravation* of thy guilt, as an *argument* to

"extenuate

SERM. V. "extenuate and soften it." Again, if such impious offenders urge in their excuse, that they *intended nothing* by their impieties; is it not a shame that the *awful name* of God, that comprehends in it the *highest* and most *important sense*, should be used *without* a meaning? Besides, we are now talking of the *nature* of things, of the *moral good* or *evil* of actions; which are determined by *fixed invariable* rules. And if there be, in nature, a *necessary difference* between virtue and vice, an action may be never the *less* wicked and disgraceful, because men have *no* design in it. "A *persecutor*, "and other criminals of an *enormous* size, "may go beyond *meaning nothing*; they "may *intend well* the promotion of God's "honour, and the establishment of what "they think to be truth; and yet their "conduct may not only be repugnant to "principles of *religion*, but abhorrent to "*common humanity*." Should it be said, in the last place, which, I know, is apprehended to be the most *popular* and the *shrewdest* plea of all, that what I am now arguing against is sometimes *necessary* to *manage* tempers, that by *mild* and *gentle* speeches

ſpeeches are ungovernable: I anſwer, "that this never does, nor *can* happen, but "when we are ſo *addicted* to Blaſphemy, "that without a volley of *Oaths* and vile "*Imprecations* we are not believed to be "*in earneſt?*" Let it be once *known* (and ſurely it may be diſcovered by many other methods perfectly *innocent)* that we have *reſolution* enough to ſupport our *authority*, and the *regard* due to our reſpective characters; and this vice will be as *unneceſſary* and *uſeleſs*, as it is *diſhonourable* to God, and *offenſive* to a ſober mind. Nay, it is not unlikely that we ſhall be more obſerved and attended to; and that not from *terror*, but from a *real reſpect:* Which, as bad as the world is, it is generally inclined to pay to *temperate* paſſions, ſobriety, and an unaffected virtue. Beſides, for want of ſuch boiſterous, domineering, *ſavage* diſcourſe, we ſhall never miſs of a *proper regard*, but on, comparatively, *trifling* occaſions; not in the great and important offices of life: And ſurely, it cannot be worth the while, in order to be ſerved more *expeditiouſly* in our *pleaſures* and *gay luxurious* entertainments (which, to cen-

ſure

SERM. V. sure with unexceptionable modesty, are of very small moment, and redound but little either to our *honour* or *advantage* :) It cannot, I say, be worth the while, for so *low* an end, to indulge a practice that bids defiance to the Almighty, leads to pernicious consequences with respect to society, and is, on all accounts, absolutely *indefensible*. By the whole of what has been offered, I hope it has been unanswerably demonstrated, that the particular character which I have endeavoured to expose, only by representing it in its true colours, " cannot be reconciled to that of " a *reasonable* or *honourable*, because not " of a good *moral*, man." I need not attempt to prove, since the words of our blessed Saviour above referred to are, as to this point, most express and decisive, that it is utterly inconsistent with the character of a *Christian*; " as inconsistent as *Chri-* " *stian* and *Intemperate*, *Christian* and *Re-* " *vengeful*, though there may be a diffe- " rence in the *nature* of the crimes." — So that if we would make our *profession* of *Christianity* correspondent with itself, if we reverence the voice of *reason* and of the

the *moral law*, if we desire to be universally *agreeable*, and study *affability* and *complaisance* to mankind, we shall not allow ourselves, in our common conversation, to *take the name of the* LORD *our God in vain*; against which all *manly*, *honourable*, *virtuous*, and *christian* principles do loudly, and with united force, remonstrate.

IN the LAST place, All *Blasphemies*, all *degrading* and *irreverent* speeches concerning the *Deity*, must, by a general parity of reason, be *forbidden* by the third commandment: "I say *irreverent* speeches, "because it is essential to the idea of *Blas-* "*phemy* as *a crime*, that it be, in *the in-* "*tention* of the speaker, dishonourable and "reproachful to God." For, otherwise, we may *all* be included under the *character* of *Blasphemers*: Since there is no man, who has any *erroneous conceptions* with respect to the supreme Being, *i. e.* absolutely *no man at all*, but who, if he communicates his *ideas* in *words*, must incur all the *guilt* and *punishment* of Blasphemy, if

SERM. V. if *mere speculations* be sufficient to constitute that guilt. "And since this way "of thinking will condemn *all mankind*, "however innocent and virtuous, and "sincerely *reverent* of God, this is a "demonstration that so severe a censure, "for matters of *opinion* only, is to the "last degree *absurd* and *unjustifiable*; "and may be *retorted* by opposite par-"ties without end, to the extirpation of "*charity*, and the scandal of *religion*." But if any through *pride*, *discontent*, and *stubbornness* of temper, if any from a disposition of mind *averse* to virtue, set themselves to *derogate* from the perfections of God, and to *revile* and *calumniate* his providence; this, in the most gentle and favourable construction, is very *criminal* Blasphemy, "the proper subject of *a mo-"ral law*, and fitly *cognisable* at the "tribunal of infinite wisdom and ju-"stice."

NOTHING now remains to be briefly spoken to but the *reason*, by which we are deterred from a violation of this sacred law, expressed in these words; *The*

LORD

LORD *will not* hold *him guiltless, that taketh his name in vain.* The phrase here used was not intended to denote a *softening*, but rather, perhaps, an *aggravation* of the punishment. For it may amount to exactly the same, as if we were to say of any *notorious* offender, "That HE shall "not escape unpunished;" which, in the general opinion of mankind, would come up to a direct affirmation, "That *he*, "*especially*, shall not escape unpunished." And it appears from what has been so largely said, concerning the *malignity* of the crimes here referred to, that this is not a mere arbitrary constitution, but founded in *wisdom*, and solid principles of *equity:* For the crimes themselves are *heinous infringements* of the law of reason, and of most *destructive tendency*; and therefore require, from the Sovereign Judge and Dispenser of Right, a *peculiar* and *exemplary* retribution.—I shall only add, by way of conclusion, what this commandment supposes as the *basis* and *foundation* of it, *viz.* "That we endeavour "to *improve*, and *raise* to the highest "pitch

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" pitch of *reverence* and *honour*, our ideas " of *all* the *attributes*, and especially of " the *moral excellencies*, and *government* " of God: Which will not only be an " effectual *check* to the impieties therein " prohibited, but a constant *preparative* " for all the duties and offices of reli- " gion."

SERMON

SERMON VI.

Of exemplary and ſhining Characters of Virtue.

MATT. V. 16.

Let your light ſo ſhine before men, that they may ſee your good works; and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

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IN the fourteenth verſe of this chapter, our Saviour tells his diſciples, that they were *the light of the world.* This was *eminently* true of the Apoſtles (and in general of the Chriſtians at that time) who were *called*, by mani-

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manifeſtations of an *extraordinary* providence, to be bright examples of a rational Piety and univerſal Virtue in the midſt of a degenerate age; and to *diſpel* thoſe *dark clouds* of ignorance and ſuperſtition, with which the whole world was overſpread. And it is in purſuance of the ſame metaphor, that *Religion* and *Virtue* are, in the text, repreſented under the name *of light*; becauſe they will abide the *teſt* of reaſon, and bear the moſt *accurate* and *ſevere* examination: Whereas, vice and impunity of all kinds are things ſo *foul* and *unnatural*, that they are *aſhamed* of being *diſcovered*, and of having their deformity *expoſed* to public view. I ſhall only add farther, by way of introduction, that the ſenſe of our Lord's exhortation is plainly this: "That the profeſſors of his "Religion ſhould endeavour, by a *well-* "*conducted* courſe of life, and an *exem-* "*plary ſtrictneſs* of manners, to charm "the world to *a love* of piety and true "goodneſs, and give them *amiable* no- "tions of Chriſtianity, and a ſtrong ſenſe "of the *wiſdom*, and *gracious providence*,

"of

" of God in its design and constitution." In discoursing from these words

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I SHALL, in the FIRST place, consider what sort of an example it is, that is likely to have such a prevailing *influence* as to excite others to an *imitation* of it, and thereby to *glorify* God.

SECONDLY, Inquire into the *reasons*, why it may justly be presumed, that *good* examples will have so much *weight* and *efficacy*. And

THIRDLY, Shew more particularly how the cause of *Christianity* is *honoured*, and receives great *strength* and *support* by the exemplary Piety and Virtue of its professors: And that, without this, all our ingenuity, application, and zeal, will scarce be sufficient to maintain a becoming *esteem* and *veneration* of it in the world.

FIRST, I am to consider what sort of an example it is, that is likely to have such a prevailing *influence* as to excite others to an *imitation* of it, and thereby

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to *glorify* God. —— It muſt be an example of what is *really* virtuous and praiſe-worthy: ——It is neceſſary that it be *uniform*, and extend to *all* the branches of true goodneſs: —— That it be *eaſy* and *natural*, free from all appearances of *affectation* and *conſtraint*: —— And that it be eſpecially eminent for *thoſe* Virtues which have a peculiar *dignity* and *beauty* attending them, and are the moſt *bright* and *ſhining* parts even of a good man's character. I ſhall ſpeak ſomewhat diſtinctly, but briefly, to each of theſe.

AND, as the *firſt* and *chief* foundation of its *influence*, it muſt be an example of what is *really* virtuous and praiſe-worthy. Religion is in itſelf ſo amiable, ſo agreeable to all the principles of reaſon, and of ſuch evident advantage to mankind, that no *plauſible* objection can be made to it, when it appears in its native ſimplicity and purity. The principle of *conſcience*, which is ſo univerſal and deeply rooted in Human nature, bears an *immediate* teſtimony to its truth and excellence. Its *voice* is ſo clear, diſtinct, and ſtrong, that it will not be eaſily

ſilenced

ſilenced by *ſophiſtical ſubtilties:* And it ſeldom happens, that it can be quite drowned even by that, which, above all other things, darkens the underſtanding, and deſtroys the inward ſenſe of good and evil, a courſe of *ſenſuality* and *intemperance.* Arguments *directly* levelled againſt the grand obligations of Virtue, inſtead of meeting with a ready reception, *offend* and *ſhock* the mind, and create a general *diſlike* and *horror*; and have had this effect, not only among the *weak* and *ſuperſtitious*, but with perſons of moſt diſtinguiſhed abilities, and the moſt impartial inquirers into nature and the reaſon of things, in all ages. —— "So powerful *an advocate*, has "the gracious Creator and Father of the "univerſe provided in every man's breaſt, "for what is *immutably* the ſupreme per-"fection and happineſs of all intelligent "beings: And ſo great is the *force*, ſo "uncontroulable the *authority*, of pure "and undefiled religion."

BUT when other things are *mixed* with it, either quite *foreign* from its true nature and deſign, or plainly *inconſiſtent* with its genuine and moſt important principles, its

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beauty is obſcured and defaced, and, for the ſake of theſe *corrupt additions*, prejudices are entertained againſt religion itſelf. And it is natural to fear, that ſuch errors and blemiſhes will raiſe a *higher diſguſt*, when they appear in *real life*, in a *pretended pattern* of piety; in proportion as *example* expoſes things in a ſtronger light than any mere *deſcription*, which is comparatively *faint* and *languid*. "An example of religion, therefore, that "is propoſed to *ſtrike* the world around "us, and engage their *imitation*, muſt be "*diſcreetly* and *judiciouſly* conducted: It "muſt proceed on a *right* general ſcheme "of religion in *all* its branches: It muſt "repreſent *nothing* as an *eſſential* part of "it, but what has a *ſure* foundation in "reaſon or revelation: It muſt not ex-"preſs an *equal* regard to things of a low "and trifling nature, which have *no con-"nection* with real Virtue and the good "of mankind, as to the juſt government "of the paſſions, and the indiſpenſable "offices of piety, juſtice, and mercy: It "muſt neither be rendered *frightful* by "unneceſſary rigors, nor *extravagant* by

"high

" high flights of enthusiasm, nor be *de-* " *based* by superstition: In a word, it " must be an example that a *wise* man, " upon *reflection*, may approve of and " imitate." If we would comply with our Saviour's exhortation, and thereby do honour to religion, we must conduct our selves so, that men may see our *good* works; " works that will *recommend themselves* by " their intrinsic fitness, either as *acts* of " *obedience* to God, or as they are *agreeable* " to the *frame* of Human nature, and *per-* " *fective* of its *faculties*; and not *offend* " and *harden* them, in a *contempt* of all " religion, by our follies and excesses."

SUFFER me to illustrate this matter farther by an instance or two, which will naturally lead to a true judgment in all other cases. The things I choose to mention, particularly, are *zeal* and *mortification.* —— When we see a man express a becoming concern for the great *truths* and *duties* of religion, which are of the utmost importance to the *present* and *future* happiness of himself and all his fellow-creatures; when he is earnest to propagate *worthy* and *honourable* apprehen-

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ſions of God, and an imitation of his *moral* excellencies, and ſets himſelf to oppoſe, by all *rational* methods, the progreſs of licentiouſneſs and vice; when he ſhews a *principal* regard to the practice of immutable uſeful Virtues, and inculcates *right ſpeculations*, and *ritual religion*, only in *ſubordination* to this nobler end, and is much more deſirous that *true goodneſs* ſhould univerſally prevail, than *ſcholaſtick niceties* and *party-diſtinctions*; when his zeal is *enlightened* and *temperate*, *cheriſhing*, and not *expelling*, mercy, and has no *other* effect upon him than to put him upon employing all his abilities and advantages for promoting truth and piety, and makes him undaunted and inflexible, under the bitterest reproaches and ſufferings, in what he *apprehends* to be the cauſe of *God*, and of moſt extenſive and laſting benefit to *mankind*: "There is "nothing in *all* this but what *reaſon muſt* "approve, nothing *weak* and *extravagant*, nothing more than a *generous* "warmth and conſtancy of reſolution, "that the *nature* of the thing itſelf re-"quires; it is an example of *greatneſs* of

"mind

" mind and an *enlarged* ſenſe of things, " of *gratitude* to God, and *benevolence* to " men, that commands veneration and " reſpect. Any thing *ſhort* of this would " argue *meanneſs* and *baſeneſs* of ſpirit: " It would be *ſtupidity* to be *indifferent* " about a thing of ſuch vaſt importance; " and to ſacrifice the glorious cauſe of " Truth and Virtue, for any conſidera- " tions of *private* eaſe and intereſt, is " moſt *deſpicable cowardice*."—— But, on the contrary, if this noble principle be ſuffered to run to an *exceſs*, inſtead of being a *credit* and *ſupport* to religion, it becomes of infinite *diſſervice* to it. If our zeal be wholly laid out on *trifles* beneath the *dignity* of religion; on advancing ſchemes of *ſpiritual tyranny*; on abſtruſe *incomprehenſible* points, and outward *forms* and *ceremonies*, more than on purity of heart and righteouſneſs of life; if it makes us fiery and impatient of contradiction, rude and inſulting, and puts us upon treating thoſe who differ from us with *contempt* and *cruelty*; " ſuch *an example*, ſo con- " trary to every rule of juſtice and hu- " manity, cannot fail of giving *offence*

" to

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" to wiſe and conſiderate men, and af-
" fords, indeed, a ſhrewd ſuſpicion, that
" our religion is little leſs than *artifice* and
" *ſelf-intereſt*."

THE ſame general reaſoning may be applied to the other inſtance, that of *mortification*.—— To keep all the paſſions *calm* and *regular*, and avoid the *exceſſes* of unlawful pleaſure, which *debaſe* Human nature, and neceſſarily introduce *confuſion* and *miſery*; to check and controul all *tendencies* to vice, and maintain conſtantly a *refined* ſenſe of things, and a *reliſh* for *moral* enjoyments; in ſhort, to ſacrifice *preſent temporary* good, and the moſt *alluring* proſpects of honour and carnal gratification, to the duty we owe to God, and the ſacred dictates of conſcience: This, which is the *only mortification* that religion requires, forms ſo excellent and worthy a character, as muſt engage univerſal *eſteem* and *admiration*. But it will have quite another effect, when it is made to conſiſt in *gloomineſs* and *ſolitude*, in *extirpating* the paſſions, and offering a perpetual *violence* to nature by reſtraining innocent deſires, in *unreaſonable* penances,

affected

affected ſeverities, and a *reſerved moroſe* behaviour: For this, beſides the *folly* of it, repreſents religion as an object of *terror*, diſcourages and damps the reſolution of thoſe who are *well-diſpoſed*, and hardens the *vicious*. "In theſe, and every "other caſe of a like kind, where *good* "principles are carried to an *extreme*, and "thereby become blemiſhes and imper-"fections, and things abſolutely *diſtinct* "from true Piety and Virtue, things *hurt-"ful*, and quite *repugnant*, to it, are mixed "and blended with it; even what is *praiſe-"worthy* in an example is likely to be "*overlooked*, and generally loſes its weight "and efficacy. *Such examples* indeed are, "upon the whole, not *fit* to be imitated: "It would neither be for the *honour* of "God, nor for the *good* of mankind."

AGAIN, the example that is likely to have ſuch a prevailing *influence* as to excite others to an *imitation* of it, and thereby to *glorify* God, muſt be *uniform*, and extend to *all* the branches of true goodneſs.—— It muſt be *ſteady* and *conſiſtent*: For how can that man expect to have any regard paid to him, who appears to have

no

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no principles of conduct, *no* ſettled rule of his actions; and whoſe life is a perpetual contradiction to *reaſon* and to *itſelf*? The rules of Virtue, of *Piety*, *Juſtice*, and *Benevolence*, of *Temperance* and *Chaſtity*, are eternal and invariable; and, for that reaſon, ought to be *inflexibly* adhered to in all circumſtances. If therefore we practiſe theſe duties only at certain *intervals*, and at *other* times are proud, cenſorious, uncharitable, or give a looſe to ſenſuality, ſuch a character is *contemptible* and *monſtrous*. The ſame may be ſaid, if we exemplify in our behaviour only *ſome* Virtues, and neglect *others* equally neceſſary and indiſpenſable —— We cannot be ſuppoſed to act, even in thoſe inſtances in which our conduct *ſeems* to be unblameable, either from a regard to the *reaſon* of things, or to the *authority* of our Maker —— Our goodneſs will be looked upon as *conſtitutional* only, or as the effect of *fancy* and *humour* —— Our *ficklineſs* and *inconſtancy* will make the weak and unthinking judge *lightly* of religion, and be urged by its profeſſed enemies as *a proof*, that it is a capricious

wanton

wanton thing, which has no certain foundation to ſupport it. — Nay, an example ſo *partial* may have this miſchievous effect, that even a man's *vices* being excuſed and ſoftened, either out of deference to his *judgment*, or for the ſake of his *good qualities*, they may become much more *infectious*, and of conſequence much more *dangerous*, than thoſe of the moſt thoroughly profligate and abandoned *libertine*.

THIRDLY, It is abſolutely neceſſary that a good example, which is propoſed for *imitation*, be *eaſy* and *natural*, free from all appearances of *affectation* and *conſtraint*. There are *proper ſeaſons* for every duty; and when they fall in naturally, as *occaſions* and *circumſtances* require, this is the true *order* and *decorum* of a virtuous life; and an evident proof that we are religious from *principle*, and *right* inward diſpoſitions. But if by an *over-acted* zeal and formality, if by being induſtrious to *diſplay* our good works to public view, we give the world around us reaſon to believe that we are only *playing* a part; it is not to be imagined that they will *follow* our example,

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example, any farther than their own *inclination* or *intereſt* direct. It is not to be expected that our example can have any ſolid weight, if we ourſelves appear not to be *in earneſt*; or the influence it will have can only be this, to engage others to practiſe the ſame *deceit* and *hypocriſy:* But it is much more probable that it will be attended with this *very bad* conſequence, to make them regard religion itſelf as *all affectation.* And if our religion ſits *uneaſy* upon us, and is clearly perceived not to be the *free* ſervice of *liberal* and *ingenuous* ſpirits, but the drudgery of *ſlaves* extorted from them by terror; this muſt of neceſſity ſtrengthen that *common* and moſt *fatal* prejudice againſt the practice of it, *viz.* That it is a grievous impoſition and *burden* upon Human nature, and inconſiſtent with true *liberty* and *happineſs.*——Let your religion then be *chearful*; between the two extremes of *ſourneſs* on the one hand, and a thoughtleſs unbecoming *levity* on the other. Enjoy the bleſſings of providence with an eaſy thankful mind, and ſcruple not to *uſe*, within the bounds of innocence

cence and moderation, those conveniencies and agreeable accommodations, which God, in his infinite goodness, hath afforded for the *delight* of Human life. For the *joyful worshipper*, who has a lively and grateful sense of God's munificence, must discharge his duty in a much more acceptable manner, than he that presumes to worship him with a *peevish* and *fretful* mind. And he will find, likewise, that he is much *better disposed* to perform kind offices to the rest of mankind, than he could possibly be, if he gave himself up to *sullenness* and *discontent*. A thoroughly virtuous man may not, indeed, have it *always* in his power to dispel an habitual *gloom*, or divert those *fears* and *despondencies*, which are the weakness and unhappiness of his constitution. " But yet, all must allow, that " *these* are not the *natural attire* and " *garb* of Virtue; they *disguise* and *veil* " her excellence: And if she be really " amiable, beneficent, and *Divine*, she " ought to have some *brighter* distinction, " and to appear in a more agreeable " and *engaging* form." It must, therefore,

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fore, be the unqueſtionable duty of all the truly good, *to endeavour at leaſt*, to baniſh, from their *religious* manners, both the ſolemnity and *ungraceful* ſtiffneſs of the *Phariſee*, and thoſe *recluſe*, *unſociable*, *dejected* airs, which have been introduced by *ſplenetic* and *frighted* Enthuſiaſts: For, while theſe are continued, piety is quite ſtripped of *its own proper* ornaments, "and aſſumes the *habit* of *craft*, *vice*, "and *ill-nature*."

FINALLY, In order to give a good example its *due* efficacy, it ſhould be eſpecially eminent for thoſe Virtues, which have a peculiar *nobleneſs* and *beauty* attending them; and are the moſt diſtinguiſhed and *ſhining* parts even of a *good* man's character:——For a firm *integrity*, that no temptations can corrupt;——for a diſintereſted *generoſity* and univerſal *good-will* to mankind;—for a temper of *ſympathy* and *friendſhip*, of *gentleneſs* and *condeſcenſion*; and, to enumerate no more particulars, for *modeſty* (in oppoſition to oſtentation and arrogance) which, while it *declines* and ſeems leaſt *fond* of applauſe, is generally moſt *ſure* of obtaining it; and the

the *easy unaffected* charms of an humble deportment, which strike and captivate every beholder. There is a certain *agreeable* manner, inseparable from true humility, which makes the most *indifferent* actions tolerable at least, if not graceful; whereas there is in the contrary conduct, for the most part, a stiffness, insolence, and rudeness, that renders even the *best* offensive.

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I NOW proceed to inquire, in the SECOND place, into the *reasons*, why it may justly be presumed, that a good example will have so much weight and influence: —— And, *First*, It shews to all mankind that the duties of religion are *practicable*; and therefore may justly be required by a wise and merciful Governour. Men of sensual inclinations, and who have contracted habits of vice, are apt to entertain a very *formidable* notion of the rules of Virtue; as if they were too *refined* for this imperfect state of things, and *above* the present debilitated powers of Human nature: And, was this objection *true*, it would strike at the very root of all religion

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and morality. But when we ſee *living examples* of a ſublime piety, and regular ſelf-government, of benevolence improved to a god-like pitch, of firmneſs and conſtancy under the foreſt trials, this immediately removes all ſuch *diſcouraging* impreſſions; and affords an undeniable *demonſtration*, ſuited to all capacities, that God has required nothing of us but what we have a *ſufficient ability* to perform. And it is very obvious, what a *natural* foundation this is of a virtuous life: For when it is once proved that our duty is *poſſible*, its viſible tendency, in every part of it, to exalt and perfect Human nature, to promote private happineſs and the general good of the world, will be a ſufficient argument of its truth and excellence, and univerſal obligation; and leave us utterly *inexcuſable* if we neglect it.

BUT I may go one ſtep further than this, and ſuggeſt another conſideration to ſhew the great *force* and *efficacy* of good examples, *viz.* "That when we ſee the "greateſt and nobleſt acts of Virtue, "and the moſt ſevere inſtances of ſelf-"denial, practiſed with *eaſe* and *freedom*; "we

" we have the clearest evidence which " any matter of *fact* is capable of, that " there is not even so much *difficulty* in " religion, as wicked men especially fright " themselves with the *apprehension* of:" — That what *difficulty* there is, is chiefly at the *first entrance* on a virtuous course; that it is *no more* than what always attends the breaking *any other* strong habits, and fixing contrary dispositions in the mind; and that after we have been, for some time, inured to exercises of piety, we shall find them much more *natural* than any vicious pursuits; and the source of more substantial and durable satisfaction.

To all which we may add, That an exact pattern of Virtue is a much better *directory*, to the generality of mankind, how to conduct themselves in regulating the passions, and in the various offices and duties of life, than their own private reflections: For though the general principles and duties of religion are very *plain*, and may easily enough be *accommodated* to particular circumstances, if men will allow some time for consideration; yet this is a thing that the greatest part of the world

SERM. VI. are very little *uſed*, and ſtrongly *diſinclined*, to: And to this, among other cauſes, it is undoubtedly owing, that they run into ſo many errors and irregularities in their behaviour. Whereas when they ſee Virtue, in *real life*, exemplified in the minuteſt paaticulars, they quickly diſcern that it is *fit* and *reaſonable*, ſuited to their *own* condition, and the proper conduct for *them* to follow; though their indolence, habitual want of reflection, or multiplicity of worldly cares, might have *prevented* their forming, without this help, the ſame juſt and uſeful concluſions.

LET it be farther obſerved, That there is a moſt powerful *attraction* in a good example; and that both the *dignity* of Virtue which commands reſpect, and the *amiable beauties* of it which render it the object of eſteem and admiration, are repreſented in the ſtrongeſt and moſt engaging light. Every one, that knows Human nature, muſt be convinced, that the ſame *great* actions, when exhibited to our view in a *living example*, ſtrike more forcibly, and make a much more laſting impreſſion upon the mind, than in the moſt

artful

artful and *moving narration.* The *courage*, for inſtance, and *bravery* of the primitive Martyrs (who nobly endured the moſt grievous ſufferings, and choſe rather to die than to forfeit their integrity, and deſert the cauſe of God and of his truth) operate but *faintly* when read in *hiſtory*, in compariſon of what they might be expected to do on *eye-witneſſes*; and are not ſo likely to inſpire into others the ſame *reſolution* and *magnanimity.* So that in this reſpect, which is very conſiderable, *example* has much the advantage of mere inſtruction and reaſoning. —— And, beſides, many of the *general* arguments for a religious and virtuous life are therein *delineated* in the brighteſt colours. — We ſee the bleſſings that *temperance* procures; *health* of body, *ſtrength* and *vigour* of mind, and in general (if compared with its contrary vice) a *long, chearful, happy* life. —— In the eſteem and high regard that are paid to Virtue, we ſee it to be the almoſt unanimous ſenſe of mankind, that it is the *perfection* of Human nature, and the foundation of public *order* and *happineſs.* —— In the *patience* and *reſignation*

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of the good man under afflictions, we have a moſt convincing and lively proof that religion is our *ſureſt* ſupport under the calamities of life; and affords an agreeable relief when *all other* comforts leave us, and when a conſciouſneſs of *guilt* would be a dreadful aggravation of our miſery. And, to mention no more, we are taught by the *ſerenity* and ſteddy *compoſure* of a ſtrictly virtuous example, that *wiſdom*'s ways are *ways of pleaſantneſs*, and all *her paths peace*. — "Theſe "things are *realiſed* to us, juſtified and "confirmed by *experience*; it is obvious "to our very *ſenſes* that they have a "foundation in *nature*, and are *certain* "truths:" Which muſt be much better calculated for giving complete ſatisfaction to the mind, and influencing our conduct, than any mere abſtracted reaſonings. To conclude this head; A bright example of Piety and Virtue *reproves*, and *awes* the diſſolute manners of the prophane and vicious, and naturally excites *ſhame* and *remorſe*; it awakens *conſcience* and *ſober reflection*; it ſtirs up a ſenſe of *ingenuity*, which a long courſe of wickedneſs may

have

have almoſt extinguiſhed; it raiſes a noble ſpirit of *emulation*, which will put men on vigorous endeavours to break through the evil habits they have contracted, and, if it be encouraged, will carry them on to a *ſublime* pitch of Virtue. They will not be contented with low attainments, but aſpire after *perfection*; and be ambitious, themſelves, to exhibit the *faireſt pattern* of univerſal rectitude and beneficence. This may ſuffice as a ſhort general account of the efficacious influence of a good example.

THE LAST thing propoſed was to ſhew, more particularly, That the cauſe of *Chriſtianity* is honoured, and receives great ſtrength and ſupport, from the *exemplary* piety and goodneſs of its profeſſors. This will appear undeniably, if we conſider the *reproaches* which have been thrown upon it, and the *injury* it has *actually* ſuffered, on account of their irregular and vicious behaviour. And indeed to *ſtrangers*, who know nothing of the *laws* of Chriſtianity, and the *purity* and

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ſtrictneſs of its doctrines, ſuch a behaviour muſt have a very *ill* aſpect, and naturally tend to inſpire a *prejudice* againſt it. And, even among *our ſelves*, ſome of the moſt *common* and *popular* objections againſt our holy religion have their foundation *here*. The diſorders of *Chriſtians*, eſpecially of chriſtian *miniſters*, their inſatiate *ambition* and *avarice*, *pride* and unrelenting *cruelty*, their *factions*, *crafts*, and ſpiritual *tyranny*; theſe things, I ſay, have been ſet out in the moſt *frightful* colours in order to ſully the *honour* of Chriſtianity itſelf. "It is, without doubt, an argument of a "*weak* judgment or a *perverſe* diſpoſition, "to make thoſe very diſorders *objections* "againſt the Chriſtian ſcheme, which it "ſo ſtrongly and ſeverely *condemns*." But as this is the real ſtate of the caſe, and many *are* prejudiced, though it be upon ſuch a frivolous and ſhallow foundation; this calls loudly upon us, if we have any concern for the *Credit* of the Chriſtian name, to endeavour to put a ſtop to theſe unjuſt reflections, by *having our converſation as becomes the goſpel of Chriſt*. This

will

will not only *silence* all cavils of this kind, but *dispose* men to entertain a favourable opinion of Christianity, and examine it with ingenuity and candour. —— "And "if the *ministers* of the gospel would "drop all *party*-views, and be concerned "for the interest of religion in general; "if they would be *humble* and *peaceable*, "and renounce all *imposing* methods and "the detestable spirit of *persecution*; if, "instead of *exorbitant* claims and *high-* "*flown* notions of *Church*-power, they "would assert and inculcate the right of "*private* judgment, and exhort their "hearers to an *impartial study* of the "Holy Scriptures; if, instead of pro- "moting *ignorance* and *superstition* to "serve ambitious and selfish views, they "would, in earnest, set themselves to "form in mens minds *rational* senti- "ments of religion, and take them off "from *angry controversies*, and a zeal for "*trifling pageant ceremonies*, in order to "promote an universal regard to the "eternal and immutable rules of *mora-* "*lity*, and, instead of *lording it over*

"*God's*

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"*God's heritage*, would become *enſamples* "*to the flock*——And if all the *people* "would *concur* in this moſt deſirable re-"formation, being, as Chriſtianity directs, "*patterns* of purity, peace, and love, and "of a generous inflexible virtue"—Then we might expect that our holy religion would *flouriſh*, and *triumph* over all oppoſition; and that men, being diſpoſed to think favourably of it by beholding the bleſſed *effects* which it produces, in thus *refining* Human nature, would ſubmit to the *light* and *evidence* of truth.

THERE is a great complaint in this day of looſeneſs of *principles*, and of the growth and progreſs of *infidelity*. But what ſignify *mere complaints*, to what purpoſe are the moſt *pathetic declarations*, without inquiring into the *origin* and *root* of this evil, and taking the moſt *effectual methods* to remedy and put a ſtop to it? ——And what are they? — Why it is certainly a moſt eſſential point, that we give a *due force* to our arguments by *practiſing* that univerſal and exalted goodneſs, which our holy religion recommends.

"Without

" Without this, it is pretty much indif-
" ferent whether we our ſelves are *Ma-*
" *hometans*, *Heathens*, *Chriſtians*, or down-
" right *Atheiſts*." And if there is a vi-
ſible inconſiſtency between our *manners* on the one hand, and our *ſolemn profeſ-ſions* and *ſtudied defences* on the other, the cauſe, which we eſpouſe, muſt be liable to continual *inſults*. — " *Particular ar-*
" *guments* for its truth and excellence may
" be never *known*, or never *conſidered*, by
" the bulk of mankind; but *public cor-*
" *ruptions* are eaſily *aggravated*, and, with
" a little art, worked up into *popular* and
" *ſtanding* objections againſt it." — Let us therefore recommend Chriſtianity, not by *endleſs diſputes* about *trifles*, and the tranſ-ports of a blind ill-directed *zeal*, but by the *purity* of our intentions, and a *beau-tiful ſimplicity* of manners; not by treat-ing its *adverſaries* with rudeneſs and ſeve-rity, but by joining *calmneſs* of temper to *a perſuaſive clearneſs* and *ſtrength* of rea-ſon, and by an example of unſpotted and *irreproachable* integrity; that we may re-preſent it to be (as it is in itſelf) " a *doc-*

" *trine*

SERM. VI. " *trine according to godlineſs, perfective* " of Human nature, and *adapted*, in the " higheſt degree, to promote *peace on* " *earth* and *good-will towards men.*" In a word, *let* our *light ſo ſhine before men, that they may ſee our good works; and glorify our Father who is in heaven.*

SERMON

SERMON VII.

Of Slander, and Defamation.

EXODUS XX. 16.

Thou ſhalt not bear falſe witneſs againſt thy neighbour.

THIS, together with the three preceding precepts of the decalogue, compleat one part of the *ſcheme* of moral duty; as there is contained in them (either more expreſsly, or by an eaſy and natural deduction) a prohibition of all the *groſſer* inſtances of *injuſtice*, by which mankind are capable of annoying and hurting each other. And as the

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the four grand branches of Human *property* are, *therein*, most plainly and distinctly comprehended, so are *they* placed in as exact an *order* as can well be devised; and may serve, so far as they extend, for *a rule*, by which to frame a regular treatise of *morality*. The *Sixth* Commandment was intended to secure the *life* of our neighbour; and, in a fair method and train of consequential reasoning, his *person* too from all unjust and cruel violence: The *Seventh* guards the *honour* of his *house*: The *Eighth* all the other *external* branches of his property: And the next, which is now to be considered, his *good name* and character against unrighteous accusations, and against the *infamy* and innumerable *mischiefs*, that may derive themselves from this *source* of *evil*.

THE words of the text might have been more strictly rendered, according to the *Hebrew* original, *Thou shalt not answer against thy neighbour* as *a false witness*: Which seems to imply in it, that the person *witnessing* is called upon to give his testimony by *public authority*, and in some established legal court of *judicature*.

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How then, it may be asked, came this to be particularly inserted among the laws of the decalogue, when it had been *before* prohibited, in the Third Commandment, under the head of *perjury?* — To which the answer is obvious, "That as there "may, in a multitude of cases, be *per-* "*jury*, where there is *no testimony*, good "or bad, produced concerning another; "so a man may be a notorious and scan- "dalous *false witness*, where *no oath* at "all is required: And the *guilt* would "be exactly the same, as to the single "article of *corrupt* and *iniquitous testi-* "*mony* (to which the text directly and "solely relates) if publick accusations were "supported and carried on, without any "form of *swearing* or solemn appeal to "God, upon the *bare affirmation* of the "accuser." The things therefore are in their nature *distinct*, and may with the utmost propriety be *distinctly* forbidden: And though these crimes were really *coincident* in the *Jewish* state, or, in other words, generally went *together* (as they do likewise in almost all modern constitutions of government) this does not in the least

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leaſt hinder their being of different conſideration in themſelves, and the proper ſubject of different *laws*. And this, I apprehend, is the true ſolution of the preſent caſe. In the Third Commandment the *perjury* alone is condemned, as an act of inſolent impiety, and defiance of God, whether it was, or was not, committed to maintain or confirm a wrong and injurious *charge* againſt our neighbour; but, in the Ninth Commandment, the unrighteous *teſtimony* is the immediate and only thing prohibited, without any regard had to the offenders *ſwearing falſly*, or taking *any oath* at all. And as I have already ſufficiently treated of the crime here ſpoken of, in the inſtances where *civil juſtice* is concerned, under the head of perjury, and ſhown its pernicious conſequences to ſociety, and to mankind in general; I ſhall offer nothing farther on that particular branch of the ſubject. And becauſe the iniquity *in itſelf* is exactly the ſame, though the *effects* may not always be the ſame, whether it be practiſed in civil *courts*, or acted more at large, and without reſerve, on the *open theatre*

of

of the world; the reason of the thing not only warrants, but obliges me to point out some of the *chief* instances of it, which, be they ever so *common*, ever so *fashionable*, are of most flagrant *baseness*, and beyond expression *hurtful*.

IN the FIRST place then, we are guilty, to a very notorious and inexcuseable degree, of *bearing false witness*, when we say things, to the disparagement and prejudice of others, which we *know* to be untruths: This is most properly stiled *calumny*; "and "be the occasion of it ever so *plausible*, "whether to advance our *fortune*, esta- "blish our *character* without a *rival*, or "even to oppress and sink an *enemy*, it "must be branded with signal *infamy* by "all who retain a right and clear sense of "the difference of good and evil, because "it is a vile *compound* of deliberate *falsehood* and *injustice*." —— Next to this, is the *raising*, or *spreading*, scandalous and injurious reports of any without *sufficient evidence*, or upon *slight* and *improbable* grounds — such as the bad word of an enemy, or of prejudiced and interested persons, who are under a *visible bias* to

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misrepresent their character — such, again, are *loose imperfect* accounts picked up by busy officious *tale-bearers*, who are so eager to get and propagate a *new* story, that they are easily *deceived*, and must of necessity lose many *material* circumstances, and therefore ought *never* to be *credited* ——or, to mention no more, *common report*, than which nothing is more *uncertain*, *variable*, and *inconsistent* with itself; which frequently takes its rise from an *entire mistake* of persons and circumstances; is sometimes mere *surmise* and *invention*; and generally *disguises* the *little* truth, that happens to be the foundation of it, under a heap of *fabulous* additions. Of the same nature is all that *Defamation*, which is grounded on *conjecture* and *suspicion*; for instance, if when a man's actions are capable both of a good and bad interpretation, we fix on that which is the most *unfavourable*, and *represent* them, with such an *invidious* turn, to their great disadvantage —— This is a high pitch of *iniquity* and *inhumanity*: For if every one's character may be described, according to the *diffidence* and *gloomy suspicions*

of

of a jealous temper, the *best* and most *unexceptionable* will be treated *unmercifully*, and must expect to fall under very *severe* and *hard* censure. It is therefore one part of the *Psalmist*'s description of that happy man, *who shall abide in the tabernacle of the* LORD, *and dwell in his holy hill*, that he *taketh not up a reproach against his neighbour*. And St. *Paul* assures us, that christian charity *thinketh no evil*, but *believeth all things*, and *hopeth all things*. To which it may be added, that where this sublime and generous principle operates in its true perfection, it will *fix* this as an eternal and indispensable *rule* — never to say any *reproachful* things, on the most warrantable and urgent occasions, even of those who have *deserved* the *least* from us, but what we are satisfied, upon *good grounds*, are real fact, and may be *proved* beyond *all contradiction*.

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ANOTHER thing, which may justly be reckoned a branch of the vice prohibited in the text, is *Detraction*: For we are most evidently guilty of bearing a *corrupt* and *false testimony* against our neighbour, when we *derogate* from his *general* worth,

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or endeavour to leſſen the *particular* merit of his good actions. This may be *attempted* various ways; ſome of which are more *groſs abuſes*, others more *refined* and *artful* to avoid the direct *foul* appearance of envy and ill-nature. I ſhall briefly hint at a few of the moſt conſiderable —— As when we ſuggeſt that a man's *virtues* may proceed not from *choice* or *motives* of religion, but from other principles that either *diminiſh* their excellence, or render them mere pieces of *artifice* and *well-acted* hypocriſy; his temperance and chaſtity from *natural conſtitution*; his devotion and piety from a *warm*, *lively*, and *enthuſiaſtic* temper; or that the *outward form* of virtue *only* is aſſumed, to promote a preſent *ſecular* intereſt — When we confound his *good qualities* with *vices* that bear ſome *reſemblance* of them; calling ſteadineſs and inflexible integrity *obſtinacy*, and a ſtrict regulation of manners, and aſſiduity and zeal in the duties of piety, *preciſeneſs* and *ſuperſtition* — When, to caſt an aſperſion on his *general* character, we *revive* the memory of *former miſcarriages*, which he has ſincerely repented of and long relinquiſhed;

quiſhed; or elſe, when we hear him commended, throw in his *blemiſhes* to ſhade and eclipſe his merit, or allow that his conduct upon the *whole* has been praiſeworthy and honourable, but ſhew at the ſame time in what parts it might ſtill have *excelled*; and in order to *hide* our deſign to *detract* from his *virtues*, and *inſinuate* his *defects* the more ſucceſsfully, conclude all with ſome *general ſolemn* reflections upon the *imperfection* of the world, and the *frailty* of the beſt of men.

LET me add once more, that if we *bear falſe witneſs againſt* our *neighbour*, when we *derogate* from the *merit* of his good qualities, we muſt undeniably involve ourſelves in the ſame guilt, when we *aggravate* his *faults*: — Not making *due allowances* for the univerſal infirmity of Human nature, and the particular unhappineſs of the offender, ariſing from ſtrength of *paſſion*, a corrupt, looſe, unguarded *education*, and the *temptations* and *difficulties* with which he is ſurrounded; or elſe hiding *all* circumſtances that, in a candid conſtruction, would be thought to

SERM. VII. *extenuate* his guilt, and magnifying *every* little point which has an *unfavourable* aſpect, and tends to his *diſgrace*; or, finally, denominating his *character* from *one* ſingle action which is contrary to the rules of virtue and religion, and beſtowing on him, for *that*, thoſe black and odious titles, which only belong to *habits* of vice. Thus for example, if any one, in ſpeaking of St. *Peter*, ſhould give this *general* account of him, that he was a *liar* and an *apoſtate*, becauſe he *once* denied his maſter, and mention nothing at all of his *repentance*, and of the ſincere and inviolable regard to *truth*, which he always diſcovered in the remaining part of his life; or if we ſay of another, that he is a *ſenſualiſt* and a *libertine*, merely from *one act* of intemperance; is not this moſt infamous Slander, is it conſiſtent with *candor*, or with common *equity*? — If we *ſtrain* thus unmercifully, and allow ourſelves ſuch an *unbounded* latitude of cenſure, *no* reputations can be *ſafe*: And if the ſupreme almighty Judge was to *treat* his frail creatures with the *ſame rigour*, which they

they are ſo apt to *expreſs* towards each other, *all* mankind muſt be cut off from the expectation and hope of *mercy*. SERM. VII.

IT may be proper to remark farther, that all theſe ſeveral *kinds* and *degrees* of guilt may be contracted, not only by *directly* and *openly* aſſaulting our neighbour's character (which is the *faireſt* method of Defamation, and has, comparatively ſpeaking, ſome ſhew of *generoſity* in it, as it gives him an opportunity of *ſelf-defence*) not only, I ſay, may all this guilt be contracted by direct aſſaults upon our neighbour's character, but by other ways that operate in the *dark*, and privately *undermine* it, and are, therefore, both more *baſe* and *miſchievous*: Such as cloſe *whiſperings*, by which a man's reputation may be *deſtroyed* before he himſelf knows that it is *attacked*, and the ſcandal is much more likely to *ſpread*, becauſe there is no *alarm* given, and conſequently but little *precaution* taken to prevent it; ſuch, again, as general *hints*, ſufficient to *infuſe* an *ill* opinion of others, but withal ſo *indiſtinct*, that the perſon, who uſes this *wicked art*, cannot have the Calumny *faſtened* upon

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him, and is at liberty to *disown* it. Farther, the more *reserved* detractor executes the vile design of *blasting* his neighbour's good name, by shewing marks of *diffidence* when he hears his character mentioned with applause; expressing, indeed, a *cold faint* hope that he is a *worthy* person, and deserves respect and honour; but strongly intimating either in his *discourse*, or by a manner of *behaviour* much more significant, that he has his reasons for *doubting* of it: Which are left to be *framed*, *multiplied*, and *aggravated* by fancy and suspicion. Or else, an *exception* is made to his excellencies; he is just, but not *generous*; honest, but not *prudent*; and it is much lamented, that he has not *these* added to his other good qualities, to render him a *finished* and *shining* character. Add to all this, that if these *sly* methods of abuse are accompanied "with "a seeming air of friendship, and ten-"der concern for our neighbour's repu-"tation," they may be reckoned the most refined, exquisite, and diabolical *art* of Defamation. The *wounds* of such a friend, who, it is taken for granted, would not

exag-

exaggerate, nor ſay the *worſt*, nor the *whole*, of what he knows, ſtrike *deep*, and are, of all others, the moſt *incurable*.— SERM. VII.

I SHALL conclude this head, with juſt mentioning ſome of the different *aggravations* of the injuſtice and wickedneſs which I am now arguing againſt, ariſing from the *principles* from whence it proceeds. The *higheſt* pitch of guilt is, when it ſprings from *envy* and inveterate *malice* againſt our brother. The *next* to this is, when without any formal enmity, or conceived reſentment, we join in defaming him, to recommend ourſelves to the *favour* of thoſe on whom we have a dependence, and to advance our own *private advantage*. The *leaſt* criminal of all is the *unmeaning* Slanderer, who is free with the characters of others from a mere habit of *impertinence*, or to ſuit himſelf with the *genius* of the company which he frequents, or for want of *other* ſubjects of diſcourſe. And yet even *this*, who is the moſt innocent, has a *great* proportion of guilt: For he may be altogether as *miſchievous*, and do the ſame fatal *execution*, as a deliberate offender. And it muſt

be

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be a wretched excuſe for any man's injuſtice, in the judgment of impartial reaſon, to ſay that he *never thought*, nor had *any concern* about the conſequences of his actions. Such perſons are like *Solomon*'s madman, with this unhappy diſtinction, that their madneſs is *voluntary*: "They "ſcatter *fire-brands, arrows and death*, "and ſay,——Are we *not in ſport?*"

Prov. xxvi. 18, 19.

HAVING thus particularly and largely ſpecified ſeveral ways, in which we may become juſtly chargeable with the violation of the precept contained in the text, and which may oftentimes produce more malignant and fatal effects, than even the *bearing falſe witneſs* againſt our neighbour in *a public court of juſtice*; I ſhall now ſuggeſt a few conſiderations, beſides what have already been occaſionally offered, which will unconteſtably demonſtrate the *iniquity* and *evil* of this practice.——It is extremely *baſe* in itſelf, as an act of high *injuſtice*, as it argues a defect of *generoſity*, and always ſprings from *mean* principles, from the moſt *deteſtable* paſſions of Human nature, and frequently from an *evil* conſcience. For thoſe who want

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ſoundneſs and *integrity* of heart themſelves, and are *inwardly convicted* of irregularities and diſorders in their own conduct, are naturally *ſuſpicious* and inclined to *cenſure* others; and fond of all opportunities of *publiſhing* and *augmenting* their faults, for fear of too narrow a *ſcrutiny* into their own.

THIS vice is, in the SECOND place, an unnatural *perverſion* of the deſign of *ſpeech*, which was ordained, by the great creator, to be the inſtrument of friendly intercourſe and common happineſs in ſociety. Without it, we might indeed *herd* together as the *brutes* do, prompted by an *inſtinct* of nature; but ſhould have been incapable of enjoying the moſt *refined* pleaſures of Human life, incapable of improving each other's minds, and of communicating mutual advice and conſolation. The unqueſtionable *deſign* of ſpeech is, therefore, the *good* of mankind: So that if we abuſe this noble faculty, which is elegantly ſtiled in ſcripture the *glory* of a man, in Calumny and Detraction, and conſequently in doing *miſchief* to our fellow-creatures,

we

SERM. VII. we contradict the *gracious intent* of the God of nature, and ungratefully abuse his *distinguished goodness* in our frame and constitution.

BUT this leads me to mention the *pernicious consequences* of Defamation; to the criminal himself, the person defamed, to society, and to religion.——To the *defamer* himself, as it exposes him to hatred, and makes all persons shy of his conversation, lessens his credit, and brings embarrassments and difficulties upon him, obliging him frequently to make shameful recantations, and redress the grievance which his unruly tongue had occasioned; in short, as it renders him the object of universal contempt, cools the affection of his friends, exasperates and heightens the resentment of his enemies, naturally creates inward remorse and shame, and subjects him to the displeasure of God, and the punishments of the world to come.——The mischievous consequences to the person *defamed* are, loss of reputation, on which his subsistence and comfort in a great measure depend, and which by an ingenuous mind

mind is held equally ſacred with life; and, as the reſult of this, great inward diſquietude and anxiety, a diminution of his buſineſs, and conſiderable injury in his worldly affairs: So that the bad effects of this vice may not be confined to the firſt more *immediate* ſufferer, but tranſmitted down to his *poſterity*.——To *ſociety* Defamation and Slander muſt be extremely prejudicial, by deſtroying confidence, harmony, and mutual good offices, and producing animoſity, contention, and violence among the members of it.—And to religion it may be of diſſervice various ways: By fixing in the minds of many ſtrong prejudices againſt it, when they ſee that its profeſſors pay ſo little regard to juſtice and humanity; by diſcloſing the ſecret failings of perſons, otherwiſe of excellent characters, who are either employed to explain religion, or eminent ſupports of it; I ſhall only add, that the virulent terms of reproach, with which the ſeveral parties of Chriſtians have loaded each other for trifling inſignificant differences, have been a means of extirpating that amiable ſpirit of charity and unconfined benevolence,

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nevolence, which the gospel expresly stiles *the bond of perfection*, and visibly weaken the interest of common christianity; and expose it to insolent derision. And upon these accounts, *viz.* because *Defamation* is so vile a crime in itself, so inconsistent with all religion natural and revealed, such a monstrous abuse of speech the peculiar privilege of humanity; and for its destructive consequences with respect to private peace, the cause of virtue, and the general order and happiness of the world; for these reasons, I say, it is a very judicious observation of *Solomon*, that *he who uttereth slander is a* fool: And it is given by St. *Paul* (in a quotation from the Old Testament) as a description of most *abandoned* sinners, that *their throat* is *an open sepulchre—the poison of Asps is under their lips*, their *mouth is full of cursing and bitterness—and the way of peace they have not known.*

Prov. x. 18.

Rom. iii. 13, 14, 17.

I SHALL only add, to the account which has been given of Slander, Calumny, and bearing false witness, that if we take *a pleasure* in reporting our neighbour's *real* faults, because his reputation is thereby sullied, or we imagine that our

own

own will ſhine with the greater luſtre, even this is *baſeneſs* and *malice*; if we make a *cuſtom* of talking them over merely for our *amuſement*, or ſuffer ourſelves to be too highly *entertained* by ſuch melancholy ſubjects, for the ſake of ſome *ludicrous* circumſtances that may happen to be mixed with them, we ſhall loſe, by degrees, that inward *reluctance* and *horror*, that ought to be, always, *ſtrong* in the mind againſt *every* inſtance of vice: And if we allow theſe things to be introduced too *often*, or engroſs too *great* a part of our converſation, "we are in "eminent danger by *conſtant exerciſe*, and "the *incouragement* ſuch topics of diſ-"courſe will probably meet with from "the *ſpleen* and *ill-nature* of the world, "of contracting an *habit* of Scandal."

LET us, then, keep *our tongues from evil, and our lips that they ſpeak no guile.* Inſtead of employing ourſelves in defamatory and diſgraceful accounts of our neighbour's *imperfections*, let us rather reſolve to change the ſtrain and ſubject of converſation, and diſcourſe of his *excellencies*. Let us make it our buſineſs to vindicate

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dicate *aſperſed* innocence, to reclaim the *honours* due to injured merit, and illuſtrate the *dignity*, *beauty*, and *uſefulneſs* of virtuous examples. This muſt be a truly generous and noble entertainment; the pleaſures that attend it muſt be infinitely more ſolid and durable, than any that can reſult from *mean ill-natured* offices of Scandal; and it would withal, were it a cuſtom univerſally followed, be a ſtrong *ſpur* and *incentive* to virtue. Let us endeavour to diſcountenance, on all occaſions, the *malicious* Slanderer, the *envious* Detractor, the *intermeddling vagabond* Tale-bearer, as the bane of *friendſhip*, and diſturbers of the *public peace*. "A *ſteady reſolution*, "in this reſpect, would go a great way "towards *ſuppreſſing* a practice, that is too "ſhameful to *ſupport* itſelf, and grows "bold and licentious only by being *en-* "*couraged*." There are innumerable topics to ſupply an *innocent*, *chearful*, *improving* converſation, and ſome of the higheſt importance with regard to our *duty* as men, and our *eternal hopes* as Chriſtians: And therefore if any for want of *materials*, and to fill up *void ſpaces*, take

take refuge in *Scandal*, it muſt argue a pitiful *poverty* of *genius* and a moſt *contracted underſtanding*. SERM. VII.

BUT, above all, let it be conſidered, that if *frothy vain* diſcourſe, which leaves an impure tincture behind it, and if it be made a too frequent entertainment will beget an habitual levity of temper, be highly criminal; we ſhall be able to find no excuſe, hereafter, for *reviling*, *diſdainful*, *contumelious* ſpeeches, or propagating *falſe* and *injurious ſtories* concerning our brethren. " If we plead *impertinence*, it " can ſurely be *no* extenuation of our " guilt, that we have *trifled* in affairs of " the greateſt importance, and *ſported* " with our neighbour's happineſs. Should " we urge, in defence of our *freedoms* " uſed with particular characters, that it " was only to try the *acuteneſs* and *force* " of our wit; will *this* be of any avail, " that we have ſacrificed, to ſo *poor* a " pretence, the obligations of *brotherly* " *kindneſs* and of *common equity?* And as " for *envy* and *malice*, the too *uſual* " ſprings of Defamation, they are among " the *blackeſt* vices, and *themſelves* deſerve

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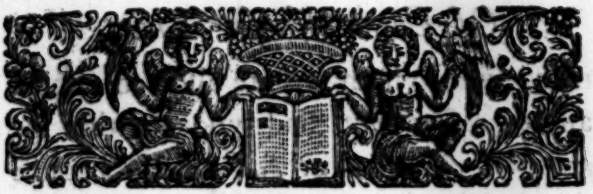
"damnation." Let us no longer, therefore, by any of these methods of unjust and groundless censure, violate the tie of humanity, and the express law of God: *For if any man among you seems to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.* And we are assured upon the *highest authority*, which as Christians we acknowledge, even that of our blessed Saviour himself (reinforcing the eternal laws of *reason* and of *God)* that by our *words* we *shall be justified, and by* our *words* we *shall be condemned.*

Jam. i. 26.

Matt. xii. 37.

SERMON



SERMON VIII.

Of Covetouſneſs, Envy, and Diſcontent.

EXODUS XX. 17.

Thou ſhalt not covet thy neighbour's houſe, thou ſhalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his man-ſervant, nor his maid-ſervant, nor his ox, nor his aſs, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

BY this commandment, we are very clearly and diſtinctly informed who is *our neighbour*, in the ſenſe and right conſtruction of the *Moſaic* law. *Reaſon* immediately ſuggeſts that it muſt be every man,

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man, with whom we are allowed to hold any *correspondence*, and who is within the *reach* of our *good* or *bad* offices; because the bond of common humanity is the *first* and most *indissoluble* obligation, into which all *accidental* affinities, all more *narrow* and *contracted* associations, must be resolved, and *there* ultimately center; and because the right of every man, and his claim to justice and beneficent offices, is *equal*, and *unalienable* from *humanity* itself. *Christianity* informs us, that as the contrary doctrine is abhorrent to *nature*, it is no less inconsistent with *religion*. We are therefore plainly taught, especially in our blessed Saviour's account (whether it be only a *parable*, or a *true history*) of the good *Samaritan*, that the love of *our neighbour* is only another phrase for the love of *all mankind*; the intercourse of whose friendly offices ought never to be superseded by the most inveterate *national prejudices*, nor by the *errors* and *corruptions* of a false religion. "The supposed "*Heretic*, the *Apostate*, the *Pagan*, the "*Mahometan*, must by us be regarded in "the

"the same light, as the *Jew* was by the "*Samaritan.*"

AND the *Jewish* law, however perverted by the *morosenes* and *sour pride* of the disdainful and supercilious Pharisee (who built his religion upon the *ruins* of nature) had the same large and generous views. For *thy neighbour*, in the intent and meaning of the text, must be *every man* without exception; unless it was only criminal in a *Jew* to *covet* the *wife* of one of the seed of *Abraham*, but not the wife of a *Gentile:* Which is so grosly an unreasonable and partial scheme of morality, that none of the remains of that people, however prejudiced, will, I am persuaded, for the honour of *Moses*, think it proper to maintain it.——It farther appears, upon a general view of the precept itself, that *all* the laws of the decalogue ought not to be considered as *political* institutions; because *this* relates to the *dispositions* and *habits* of the mind, which in the nature of the things, must be exempted from the *cognizance* of *merely civil* laws. And finally we may easily see the reason why Christ, in his account of the command-

SERM. VIII. Matt. xix. 19.

ments, has ſubſtituted in the place of *thou ſhalt not covet*——*Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf*——because "where there "are *no* ungoverned appetites, *no* crimi- "nal deſires, the current of *univerſal be-* "*nevolence* will expand itſelf, and flow "free and unconfined; and, on the "other hand, a *ſincere affection* to man- "kind in general, and *concern* for their "happineſs, will extirpate the very *ſeeds* "and *firſt principles* of every *unſocial* and "*ungenerous* paſſion." Let us now proceed to conſider what thoſe *vices* of the *mind* are, to which the text peculiarly refers.

AND, in the FIRST place, what is commonly known by the name of *covetouſneſs* muſt be one of the *principal* things included. As the world is now conſtituted, to deſire wealth and affluence as a *ſubordinate* good, with a becoming *ſubmiſſion* to the wiſdom of providence, and in ſuch a manner as is conſiſtent with preſerving the *rectitude* of our minds, with the attainment of our *ſupreme happineſs*, and the *duties* neceſſarily reſulting from ſociety;

ſociety; this, I ſay, has undoubtedly nothing *criminal* in it: But when we propoſe theſe things as our *ultimate* end, or conſider them as points in any degree *eſſential* to our happineſs, our way of thinking is become extremely *baſe* and *ſordid*, and our deſires are *irregular*, *wild*, and *unnatural*: Becauſe,

IN the firſt place, all *true* happineſs is ſeated in the *mind*; and ſo far as it depends on *outward* and *accidental* advantages, it can neither be ſubſtantial nor durable.

AGAIN, the greateſt abundance of riches, which we can imagine any man to be poſſeſsed of, will not exempt him from the *common* misfortunes and calamities of life; nor render the afflictions which he ſuffers, in any meaſure of compariſon, ſo *tolerable*, as natural *firmneſs* and *ſtrength* of mind, *equal paſſions*, and *a habit* of chearful ſerenity and quietude will do in much more *indigent* and *depreſſed* circumſtances. It will neither *correct* the peeviſhneſs of his temper, nor *leſſen* the inward diſturbance that is occaſioned by his pride and anger, nor *mitigate* the remorſe and inſupportable horrors of a guilty conſcience. So

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that he who enjoys the *calm pleaſures* of virtue, in a *low* condition, is an inexpreſſibly *happier* man, than another can poſſibly be, in the midſt of the greateſt *plenty* and *pomp* of wealth, who has reaſon to be *diſſatisfied* with himſelf, and is a *ſlave* to an indulged and *forced* appetite, as anxious and turbulent, as it is mean and ungenerous.

WE may proceed one ſtep farther, and add to this, that *ſuperfluous* wealth, unleſs it be employed in acts of *beneficence* and *ſympathizing mercy*, can contribute ſcarce the *leaſt* proportion to the *real* accommodation and repoſe of Human life. For when a man has provided for the *neceſſities*, and *proper conveniences*, of his preſent being, all beſides is, in a juſt and wiſe eſtimate, *uſeleſs*; and, as *Solomon* rightly and unanſwerably argues, there is no *good to the owner thereof, ſave the beholding* it *with his eyes*. It can ſerve for nothing but *oſtentation*, and a more *eminent diſplay* of vanity, which the unthinking and unexperienced are apt to *admire*, but the judicious and conſiderate have always *deſpiſed*.——But though riches are ſo wretchedly

Eccleſ. v. 11.

edly *defective* in the essential point of communicating happiness, they bring an *additional* load of cares along with them, and occasion, often-times, most intricate and perplexing difficulties. How they are to be *expended*, how *secured*, how *improved*, are subjects of deep and uneasy speculation. And what upon the whole can be more *extravagant*, than for *mankind*, whose proper *discrimination* from mere animals is *reason* (they being in most other respects *inferior*, and less *distinguished* than the brute creatures) what, I say, can be more *extravagant* in *men*, than to sacrifice their *health*, their *ease*, and too frequently their *virtue* for a shadow, a distant vision and dream of happiness, which they may never actually *possess*; or if they possess never *enjoy*; which, in *fruition*, cannot yield half the pleasure with which it deludes and flatters in the *expectation*; and may, besides, *spoil* their tempers and *corrupt* their integrity, and so be, upon the whole, a real *evil*, and justly to be *deprecated*. For St. *Paul* has observed, according to the natural train and course of things, and upon the experience of all ages,

SERM. VIII. ages, that *they that* will *be rich, fall into temptation and a ſnare, and* into *many foolifh and hurtful luſts, which drown men in deſtruction and perdition.*

1 Tim. vi. 9.

ONCE more, an *eager* and *impatient* deſire of riches, which farther demonſtrates that it is contrary to *nature*, is *reſtleſs* and *inſatiable*, and perpetually *tormenting*. " For ſuch deſires not being the " reſult of *reaſon*, but of *diſcontent*, *fancy*, " *humour* (the *varieties* of which are infi- " nite) they muſt be always *growing* upon " us; and carry us on, from one purſuit " to another, in an endleſs circle of *vex-* " *ations* and *diſappointments*." He that endeavours to make the *beſt* of every condition, takes the *only way* to be tolerably *eaſy* in a world that is ſo ſubject to *rotations* and *viciſſitudes*, where the ſcene is ſo *often* ſhifted, and ſo *ſuddenly* too, that the utmoſt *Human* ſkill and foreſight cannot prevent it: And if he is thoroughly *reſigned* to the conduct of providence, this will *moderate* and ſet *bounds* to his deſires. But if he wants this principle to *balance* his mind, and keep it *fixed* and *conſtant* to itſelf; if he forms *imaginary* notions

notions of happineſs, and is *fretful* and *repining* for want of things that are quite out of his power; he is never likely to be *at eaſe*, or to have his intemperate appetites *gratified*. This holds true in all caſes, but more eſpecially with reſpect to the *deſire* of *ſuperfluous* wealth, which ought always to be purſued with moderation: "Otherwiſe, as it is not an *original* paſſion in Human nature, but "arises from a *wrong* judgment of things, "and a *light unſtable* temper, there is "nothing to put *a ſtop* to its inordinate "cravings, or to hinder its proceeding "without *meaſure*, and without *end*."

IN the LAST place, no man can doubt but that it is a moſt *perverted* ſtate of Human nature, to be ſo ſtrongly intent on obtaining riches, as to ſtick not even at *injuſtice* and *inhumanity*, in order to ſecure them. For this is a *violation* of fundamental laws of *nature*, which are upon all occaſions whatever indiſpenſable. And to ſuppoſe that God has endued us with any *natural propenſity* to ſuch an *unbenevolent ſelfiſh* behaviour, is to repreſent him, in truth, as an *enemy* to virtue, and the

SERM. VIII. the *encourager* and *patron* of iniquity. "Whenever we act in this manner, we "form *wild* ſchemes, and, in effect, make "a *conſtitution* and *world* of *our own*; "we pervert the true *ſtate* and *order* of "things, and throw the *world* of *God*'s "creating into *abſolute confuſion*."

BUT this, as I hinted before, is but *one* branch of that evil diſpoſition which the text condemns——The immoderate coveting and purſuit of *pleaſure*, and of all *corrupt* and *irregular* animal gratifications, is alſo moſt plainly comprehended in it; as the ſource of many of the moſt ſcandalous and fatal *breaches* of *ſocial juſtice* and *humanity*. Animal appetites, it muſt be allowed, are *original* to our conſtitution; which, with their proper bounds, are both *innocent* and *uſeful*. "But when "we make *ſenſual* indulgences the *main* "object of our purſuit, and prefer them "to *intellectual* and *moral* enjoyments; "when they *unfit* us for diſcharging the "neceſſary buſineſs of life by *exhauſting* "our ſtrength and ſpirits; when they "are the means of *perverting*, *clouding*, "*inſlaving*, our rational faculties; when "they

" they tend to bring *guilt* and *shame* up-
" on the *innocent*, or more dreadful de-
" grees of *misery* and *hardness of heart*
" upon the *vicious*; and, in short, when-
" ever they *interfere* with the rules of
" universal righteousness and goodness:
" In all these cases, our *natural* appetites,
" which by being corrected and well go-
" verned might have answered most *wise*
" and *beneficial* purposes, become *mon-*
" *strous* and extremely *prejudicial*, and are
" undeniable violations of that sacred *law*
" of God, *Thou shalt not covet.*"

FOR, in the FIRST place, they are directly *repugnant* to the general *complex idea* and *frame* of Human nature; in which a *rational* principle is appointed to *preside* over the *sensitive*, and *direct* all its motions and impulses.

AGAIN, as God is *supremely* excellent, and possessed of *absolute* and *immutable* perfection, it must be the *chief excellency* of all reasonable beings to *resemble* him; and in proportion as they *cultivate* their internal faculties, and *improve* in virtuous and good dispositions, they advance in true *honour* and *dignity*; and the more *op-*

posite

SERM. VIII. *posite* they are, in their *temper* and the *qualities* of their minds, to this most lovely and adorable Being, the more do they *debase* their state, and render it *vile* and *infamous*. But the utmost imaginable *contrariety* to the perfect nature of God is, when we are so addicted to *sensuality*, as to have *no taste* for those *refined* and *transcendent* pleasures which are peculiar to intelligent orders.—" Man then *ceases* " to be that noble and useful being, which " God *made* him —— He *ceases* to be " distinguished and raised in the creation " ——His schemes are *narrow* and *selfish*, " a base private pleasure is his *sole occupa-* " *tion*, the public good is *neglected* and " *violated* —— Nay, he renders himself " much meaner than the *brutes* who are " *sensualists from necessity*, being *incapa-* " *ble* of the pleasures of reason and reli- " gion; who are not *injurious* to others " of the same species; who *observe* and " *follow* nature's laws; and offer *no violence* " to any *superior* faculties."

ADD to this, that when men have contracted such a *low* turn of mind, as that they are *devoted* to intemperance and impurity,

purity, they must of necessity be indisposed for exercises of *devotion* and pleasing *contemplations* of God: For by sensuality the *mental* powers are *enfeebled* and *broken*, and we become, by degrees, utterly incapable of every *great* and *generous* impression. And nothing can be more *unnatural*, than the character of the *voluntary* and *self-corrupted* sensualist in this respect likewise, *viz.* his preferring *carnal* pleasures, which are the most empty, vain, and worthless that a reasonable being can pursue, to those of *virtue*, which are pure and sublime; which neither satiate nor decay, but, on the contrary, entertain and delight in all emergencies: Since they are not derived from any circumstance without us, that is, in its own nature, *arbitrary*, *transient*, and *mutable*, but spring from the eternal reason of things which never *alters*.

I NEED say but little, after what has been already offered, concerning the *exorbitant coveting* of distinction, prehemi-nence, and worldly grandeur; because every one must perceive that many of the general reasonings, already made use of, are

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are equally applicable to *this* as to ſenſuality or avarice. I ſhall therefore only obſerve, that the mere *outward pomp* of greatneſs has nothing of ſolid happineſs in it, however it may *affect* and *tranſport* weak or depraved minds; and that though *power*, when *rightly* employed in ſuccouring the innocent oppreſſed, and vindicating the natural rights and liberties of mankind, is a *public bleſſing*, and of *extenſive ſervice* to the world; yet when it is *abuſed* to rigor and tyranny, it evidently perverts the wiſe *ſcheme* of providence, and contradicts the *rule* of God's ſupreme and univerſal dominion, in which even *infinite power* is never exerted, but under the direction of perfect wiſdom, righteouſneſs, and goodneſs. If any one therefore is influenced by *ambition*, let the object of it be *real* and not *imaginary* dignity; let him take care to improve in *nobleneſs* and *generoſity* of temper; and demonſtrate, to all with whom he converſes, that he is *truly great*, by *deſpiſing*, inſtead of eagerly coveting, the *gaudy trifles* of outward ſhew and oſtentation.

THUS

THUS have I largely considered what it is, that is more *expressly* censured and prohibited by the tenth commandment. SERM. VIII.

——But there is another thing most obviously included in it, though not in direct terms proposed and represented to us, and that is *Envy*; which *repines* and *sickens* at our neighbour's happiness, and must therefore be the *spring* of various instances of *inordinate desire*, tending to his dishonour and grievous injury: A vice, than which none more *unnatural*, as well as none of more *malignant influence*, can possibly take place in Human nature.

FOR, in the FIRST place, it is an extremely *malicious* and absolutely *inhuman* passion, "raised and cherished without any *provocation*." The person, against whom it is exercised, has done *me* no wrong to excite my resentment. His *superior* merit does not, in reality, detract from *mine*. I am no *loser* by his enjoying the happiness, at which I inwardly *murmur*; nor should I gain any solid *advantage* by his being deprived of it. So that there is less to be pleaded in excuse for *envy*, than for many *other*, which

 are

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are justly ranked amongst the most *infamous* and *detestable*, excesses. Even *Revenge*, one of the blackest passions of the soul, may urge, as its foundation, *injuries* either *real* or *supposed*; but the crime, which I am now arguing against, is *ill-will* to those who have never *offended* us, and who are, perhaps, *ready* to perform for us all *kind offices* of humanity and friendship; and consequently is a most corrupt and *vile* disposition; and impossible, by any stretch of invention, to be *reconciled* with that benevolence and universal good-will to mankind, which is an inviolable duty of religion. St. *Paul* therefore in his admirable description of christian charity, among many other essential and excellent *properties* of, mentions this as *one*, that *it envieth not*.——

1 Cor. xiii. 4.

Again, this vice is not only *cool* and *deliberate* maliciousness, indulged to the prejudice of our neighbour's *peace* and *honour*; but a constant uneasiness and *torment* to itself. For as long as there are *any* who enjoy *greater* advantages, or are raised to *superior* distinction; as long as there are *any appearances* of happiness which the envious

envious man wants, he is sure to be filled with anguish and disquietude. It must be a most *deplorable* circumstance in a man's condition, when the whole world *conspires*, as it were, against the *peace* and *comfort* of his mind. But thus it is where *Envy* prevails; *all mankind* being intent on pursuing their own happiness, according to their several inclinations, tempers, and prospects; and, when they cannot obtain *substantial content*, affecting by a *specious* and *deceitful* outside to *hide* their inward distress and perplexity. "And it is possible, that Envy may sometimes have "this most *exquisite* torture attending it, "to be *displeased* and *out of conceit* with "itself, and *repine* at the more *calm* and "*placid* state of a benevolent and friendly mind." So that it corrupts our *relish* of the true enjoyments of life, it preys upon the *spirits*, and, in *Solomon*'s phrase, is *the rottenness of the bones*; making the *body* itself waste and pine away, through perpetual peevishness and anxiety. And the *wisdom* of God is eminently conspicuous in constituting Human nature in such a manner, that so *ignominious*, *base*, and

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Prov. xiv. 30.

SERM. VIII. and *mischievous* a passion should carry its *necessary plague* and *punishment* along with it.——" And as it is neither *suited* to " the *state* of man *here*, nor *fit* for the " *abodes* of the blessed *hereafter* (the *high-* " *est felicities* of which, as they are *moral* " and *social*, Envy is not capable of re- " lishing) nothing remains, unless the " subject of it could have this *grace* al- " lowed him, to be totally *annihilated* " and *expunged* from among the creatures " of God, but that it be consigned over " to those gloomy and dismal *mansions*, " from whence *friendliness* and *joy* are " eternally banished."

LET me only add, that the *object* of this most degenerate passion *varies* according to men's particular sentiments, and schemes of life; " some envying the *rich*, " *a few* the *wise*, some the *great* and " *honourable*, others the *gay* and *fantasti-* " *cal*:" Upon which account it must frequently happen, to the everlasting scandal of this vice, that it will *fix* on things *dishonourable* to Human nature, and of very *injurious* consequence. " And in- " deed, as *ignorance* and *pride* are generally " the

" the *root* from whence it springs, it is not SERM.
" at all to be wondered at, that it appears VIII.
" *blind*, full of *extravagance*, and *irregu-*
" *larly* and *capriciously* diversified."

BUT I dismiss this topic, and proceed, to the LAST particular which I intend to mention, as included within the *view* and *scope* of the text, and that is *Discontent*; an almost universal *distemper*, and the *parent* of the far greater part of those *wild* and *unlawful covetings*, which are so injurious to our neighbour's interest, and therefore, by the express authority of God, *forbidden*. We are not indeed to affect a *sullen stupidity*, that is *insensible* of the depressions and calamities under which it is our misfortune to labour, and generally proceeds from an *untractable stubborn* spirit; nor are we to give way to an indolent temper, that never *reflects*, and *therefore* is but little *impressed* by any changes that happen in our condition. But it is our *strict* and *inviolable* duty in every station, however low and disconsolate, to maintain an *honourable* opinion of the conduct of Providence; and being satisfied that *all* its determinations are, up-

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on *the whole*, the *wisest* and *best*, to *acquiesce* in them without a repining thought, or injurious aspersion. It is our *strict inviolable* duty to *moderate* and *controul* our desires, and *suit* our temper to our circumstances; to be free from *anger* and an *over-sollicitous* perplexity; from an *unmanly* dejectedness and despondency; from *envy* against the more fortunate; and every degree of that disorder and turbulency of mind, which will inspire *designs*, and put us upon *attempts*, to alter our condition by such methods, as *religion*, *equity*, and *honour* condemn. These, I say, are ever to be held by us as most *holy* and *immutable* ties. For either *God* hath *a right* to govern us, and dispose of our affairs as *he* sees fit; or we are entirely *lawless* and *independent*. The latter is absolutely impossible, while the *relations* of Creator and Creature *subsist*; and the consequence, therefore, is self-evident, that instead of giving way to *Discontent*, we ought to bear our lot, *whatever it* be, *patiently*, and *improve* it to the best *moral* purposes, that we may sustain our character with *propriety*, and merit the *approbation* of our judge.

LET

LET us consider, farther, that there are *wise reasons* for those *intermixtures* of prosperous and adverse occurrences, which are found in the *general scene* of Human life.——That as those, esteemed the most *happy*, meet with *disappointments* and *uneasy incidents* of various kinds; so the most *unfortunate* have a much *greater* proportion of *good* than others are apt to imagine, or than they *themselves*, too intensely poring on the *dark side* of their situation, are generally *disposed* to apprehend.——That numberless evils, which they suffer, are not the original, immediate and necessary, scheme of things settled by the wise and gracious Author of Nature, but spring from *inconsideration*, *rashness*, *intemperate passion*, or a *distemper'd fancy*; either from the indiscretions and vices of the *sufferers* themselves, or of *those* with whom they are linked together in *a society* of *close* and *mutual* dependence; neither of which can be so far *restrained*, as to *prevent* their producing their *natural* effects, without continual and incessant *miracles*—— and that *these* constitute the

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SERM. VIII. *largest share* of the evils that disturb and molest Human life; for which the *Creator* is not at all answerable; they being a manifest contradiction to his *original plan*, and the *laws established* for the moral world.

SEVERAL other arguments may be suggested, to prevent *criminal Discontent* in *every station*.——As that the *original desires* and *appetites* of nature are easily *satisfied*; and the *evils* men are most commonly so impatient under, being the product of thoughtlessness, pride, luxury, and excess, may, by the help of *cool reflection* and a *steady resolution*, be in a great measure *repaired*.—That it is the height of *folly* to repine at *fixed* and *unalterable* laws of nature, or at any cross events which it is not in our power to *rectify*.——That how *grievous* soever our distress may be at present, however *confused* or *intricate* our condition, it is possible that, in this unsettled and *revolving* state, it may in time be altered, by the general *friendly* course of nature, in our favour.——That in our most *abject* situation we enjoy, perhaps,

haps, some *blessings*, which those, whom we are disposed to *envy*, are entirely deprived of, and which are preferable to all the *superficial*, but more *glaring*, advantages of their outward plenty and splendor.——And, finally, that *humble resignation* and *confidence* in God *alleviate* the cares of life, and are an eminent *support* and *aid* under the heaviest sufferings. Whereas an unquiet, agitated, discontented temper is not only *indecent*, and a *disgrace* to our character as *men*, but *impertinent* and *useless*. For, by *murmuring* against the dispensations of Providence, neither the evils we *fear* will be *prevented*, nor those we actually *feel* removed, or in the least *mitigated*, but rather increased and heightened by the *disorder* and *inquietude* of our minds. Nor will it be any *relief* to us, in such cases as these, to have recourse to *indirect* methods, in contempt and defiance of *justice*, for the *gratification* of a prevailing passion, or the *supply* of urgent wants; because this is only *shifting* the scene of misery; and exchanging outward, temporary, and perhaps *imaginary* infelicities

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infelicities which *may* be endured, for the remorſeful pangs and convulſive terrors of *guilt:* Which, unleſs *reaſon* and every *moral ſentiment* be extinguiſhed within us, muſt be *a burden inſupportable.*

THE great importance of diſcourſes on *this*, and other *moral* ſubjects of the ſame kind, appears clearly and moſt forcibly from the following paſſages in our bleſſed Saviour's *own* divine miniſtration; with which I ſhall conclude —— *And, behold one came and ſaid unto him, Good maſter, what good thing ſhall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And he ſaid unto him, — if thou wilt enter into life keep the commandments. He ſaith unto him, which? Jeſus ſaid, Thou ſhalt do no murder, thou ſhalt not commit adultery, thou ſhalt not ſteal, thou ſhalt not bear falſe witneſs, honour thy father and thy mother, and* (in the place—of *thou ſhalt not covet*, is added, becauſe, as was obſerv'd before, unfriendlineſs and malignity of temper is the ſource of all criminal and hurtful deſires) *thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf. — This do, and thou ſhall live.*

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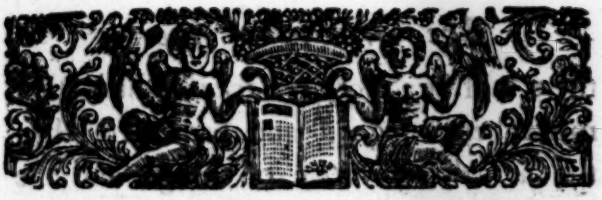

SERMON IX.

The true Ground of the Argument, from Reason, for a future State.

ECCLES. ix. 2.

All things come *alike to all.* There is *one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: As* is *the good, so* is *the sinner*; and *he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath.*

THIS observation of *Solomon* is the *ground* of one of the strongest arguments, that the light of nature suggests, for a future state; in which there

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SERM. IX. there will be a more *remarkable* distinction made betwixt good and bad men, than the *settled constitution* of things, and the *general laws* of nature, which take place in the present scene of our existence, will possibly admit of; and a more *adequate* and *impartial* distribution of rewards and punishments. The *force* of this argument has been almost universally admitted, as having its foundation in sense and experience: And it must be allowed, I think, to carry with it the utmost shew of probability, as long as it is supposed——that there is in nature an *eternal difference* between virtue and vice; that mankind are subject to a *moral government*; and that the supreme being, to whom they are accountable, is unchangeably *wise*, *righteous*, and *good*.

BUT we are too apt to destroy, in a great measure, the weight of our own arguments, by pushing matters to an *extreme*. We attend only to the single point which we have immediately in our view, without considering —— that truth is a *connected* and *uniform* scheme, and, in all the parts of it, perfectly correspondent and harmo-

harmonious —— that arguments which *contradict*, must of necessity *destroy*, each other —— And that we cannot take a more sure and effectual method to demolish that very fabrick, which we are most fond of raising, than by building on *inconsistent* principles. And, if I mistake not, something of this inconsistency too plainly appears in the reasonings of mankind, concerning the *natural* rewards of virtue, and punishments of vice, in *this life*, when these reasonings are applied to different purposes: By which means, just as much as they gain in *one* argument, they lose in *another*, perhaps, equally important; and either *the cause of virtue itself* is injudiciously exposed, or, else, the *natural evidences* of *a future state of retribution* are obscured and diminished.

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THUS we find, that if the point to be proved be the *immutable distinction* between moral good and evil; if the professed design be to evince and display the essential and intrinsic *excellency* of the former, and *malignity* of the latter; then the reasoner is apt to expatiate, without a sufficient guard, on the *present rewards*

of

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of moral rectitude, and *punishments* of sin and impiety, as if both the one and the other were, in most instances at least, *real, constant, unavoidable.* "A proper distinction is not made between the *tendency* of virtue, and the *actual consequences* of virtue." These are confusedly mixed and blended together, as if they were precisely the same idea. Virtue is incautiously represented as if it was, *in fact*, its own reward; and vice as if it was, *in fact*, its own punishment. And by thus exaggerating the pleasures of the one, and the miseries attending the other, beyond *truth*, and, in a variety of causes, against *experience*; by describing what only would be the *natural result* of both, if many unavoidable accidents did not intervene, as their *certain* and *necessary effects*; and by supposing, moreover, that the Providence of God *frequently*, and even in *common* cases, interposes in an invisible but extraordinary manner, to protect, support, and favour the upright, and, on the contrary, to bring calamities and disgraces upon the workers of iniquity: By such mistakes, I say, and confus'd representations as these, the

the *true condition* of Human life is considerably disguised; it has *few marks* left of its being an initiatory scene, a state of probation and discipline, and *much more of the appearance* of a state of recompence, and compleat scheme of moral government. — " For the more *clearly* we can " *trace* rewards and punishments *actually* " annexed to virtue and vice *here*, it will " probably be imagined, that there is, in " *proportion*, the less ground to expect " the *distribution* of them *hereafter*." Or if this should be thought, by the more considerate part of mankind, not to conclude *absolutely* (as indeed in reason it could not) against a future state of more *equal* and *full* retribution, the proofs of this important doctrine would, however, be more *perplexed* and *intricate*; *scepticks* and *infidels* might take occasion, from hence, to grow more licentious and insolent; and *weak* minds would be the more easily bewilder'd, and lost in a maze of uncertainty.

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BUT there is *another* error, the *opposite* extreme to what I have now been speaking of, which is much more common; " and

SERM. IX. "and that is aggravating the *miseries* of "good men, and describing the circum- "stances of virtue and piety as quite *dis-* "*consolate* and *forlorn* in this life, in order "to shew, in a stronger light, the ne- "cessity there is of supposing it *intro-* "*ductory* to another." And this, tho' a gross mistake, and, as I shall hereafter demonstrate, of vastly injurious consequence, is founded, among other false grounds, on some *perverted* passages of scripture; and particularly on the assertion of *Solomon* in the text, that *all* things come *alike to all*; and that there is *one event to the righteous, and to the wicked.* *Solomon*'s premises, from whence this conclusion is drawn, are undeniably *right*; but the inference itself has no manner of *relation* to them, and is entirely *wild* and *unnatural.* For this great and wise writer was only discoursing of those *external* events that happen, according to establish'd and hitherto unvaried laws, in the ordinary course of nature and providence. He intended nothing more, than that the sovereign ruler of the world did not, in general, think it fit to interpose *miraculously*, in

order

order to prevent that *promiſcuous* diſtribution of good and evil, which, in various caſes, muſt ſpring inevitably from the original conſtitution and frame of the univerſe. And as to what are the *natural* and *probable* conſequences of virtue and vice, together with the *influence* which they ſeverally have on the happineſs or miſery of the Human race, theſe are points to which he could have *no view* at all, becauſe they are abſolutely remote from the deſign and ſcope of his whole argument: Which was only to prove, that there is no way of *knowing*, certainly, *good or evil by any thing that is before us*; becauſe ſuch is the diſpoſition of things, in this *probationary* ſtate, that the ſame *events* happen *indiſcriminately*, from fixed and neceſſary laws of nature; and may be brought about by *different*, nay by quite *oppoſite*, cauſes; and the very ſame *natural* good and evil, which are oftentimes occaſioned by *moral* good and evil, muſt frequently alſo, with reſpect to us, be *accidental* and entirely *unavoidable*.

How fond ſoever therefore men may be, to ſupport a favorite ſcheme, of engag-

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ing *Solomon* on their ſide, they can never, with the leaſt colour of plauſibility, ſtrain the words of the text ſo far, as to make them ſpeak this ſenſe——" that the *plea-* " *ſures* of virtue and vice are *equal*; and " that, if we exclude the conſideration of " *futurity*, the *pious* man has no advan- " tage above the *profane*, nor the *benevo-* " *lent* man above the *malicious* and *cruel*, " nor he who carefully *governs* his tem- " per, and enjoys the bleſſing of *cool* and " *regular* paſſions, above the diſſolute and " uncontrouled *libertine*." —— This, indeed, itſelf is going a prodigious length; it is, to the common reaſon of mankind, an unaccountable ſtrain of extravagance; becauſe it aſſerts that to be the *plan* and *deſign* of providence, and the preſent *real* ſtate of Human nature, which not only contradicts univerſal experience, but is in itſelf abſolutely impoſſible. For as virtue and vice are, and muſt be, an eternal *oppoſition* to each other; and conſequently as the pleaſures, which immediately flow from ſuch inconſiſtent and *repugnant* principles, muſt of neceſſity be not only of a diſtinct, but of a *contrary*, kind: From hence

hence it certainly follows, that if the one deſerve to be *purſued*, the other ought for the ſame reaſon to be *ſhunned* and *neglected*; if the one be *noble* and *excellent*, the other muſt be *baſe* and *deſpicable*. "The "ſame kind of *external* advantages may "indeed, in ſome inſtances, happen to be "procured both by a ſtrictly *moral*, and "by an *irregular* and *unfair*, practice; "but to imagine that there can, upon the "whole, be an *exact equality* between the "pleaſures and benefits ariſing from both "of theſe, is to ſuppoſe this moſt flagrant "abſurdity, that the *effects* may, in every "circumſtance and every degree, be the "ſame, where the *cauſes* are not only "quite different, but have a direct and ir-"reconcileable contrariety in their very "nature." So that if we attempt to eſtabliſh a fundamental article of religion on ſuch viſionary and romantick fancies, on principles like this, which *confutes* and *deſtroys* itſelf, we ſave the *infidel* the trouble, of undermining religion by his own art and ſophiſtry, by doing the work to his hands; becauſe, as we build without a

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SERM. IX. *foundation*, the *superstructure* must sink and fall of course.

"OTHERS, therefore, being sensible "perhaps of this error, and yet fearing "that the yielding the argument, in point "of *natural happiness* to the cause of vir-"tue, will invalidate their reasonings for "a future state of retribution, have a-"voided the *inconsistency*, but by increasing "the *absurdity*"——By asserting, that if the *term* of man's existence is confined to the *present* life, the virtuous are *in general*, and excepting only *a few singular and eminent cases*, of all persons the most *unhappy*. ——"A strange position; that, one would "think, none who had ever known what "it was to *gratify* an irregular appetite "on the one hand, or who had *tasted* the "refined and substantial pleasures of vir-"tue on the other, could be capable of "advancing and defending;" and which a *general* consideration of the subject, without entering minutely into the discussion of particulars, will be fully sufficient to expose.

FOR if it be true, that *moral* and *religious* men, considered without the hope and

and expectation of *futurity*, are more miſerable than the *immoral* and *impious*, and that not only merely in ſome *extraordinary* caſes, but in the *common* and *regular* courſe of Human life; if this, I ſay, be true, (which every one, for the *honour* of his nature, muſt at leaſt *wiſh* to be falſe) it can only be on ſuch principles, as will render thoſe, who are devoted to the purſuit of virtue, more miſerable than even the *brutes* themſelves: I ſay than the brutes themſelves, becauſe no other principles can poſſibly juſtify ſo ſtrange an aſſertion, but thoſe which follow —— "That *ſenſual exceſſes*, if there "be no life hereafter, yield a more *ſolid* "and *manly* happineſs, than ſubmitting to "the reſtraints of *reaſon* and *religion*; "that a ſecret and ſucceſsful *fraud* is the "ſource of *truer* pleaſure, than a ſtrict "adherence to the rules of *equity* and "*honour*; and a mean degenerate *ſelfiſhneſs*, "than *generoſity* and univerſal *benevolence*. "—— And if this again be *true*, it unde-"niably follows, that the pleaſures of "*ſenſe*, upon the ſuppoſition that there "is no other life, muſt be preferable to

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" *intellectual* and *moral* enjoyments; those
" of the *inferior*, and *less noble*, to those
" of the more *excellent* and *sublime* part in
" our composition.——And if so, *sensitive*
" gratifications must be *always* preferable
" to those of a *moral* nature. For if a
" life of *reason* and *virtue*, to *eternity*, be
" more eligible than a life of *sense*, it must
" be so, in itself, in every *part* and *period*
" of our duration; and, on the contrary,
" if a *sensitive* happiness be, in itself, or ex-
" cepting a few rare and extraordinary
" instances, more valuable than a *rational*
" and *moral* happiness in *any* part of du-
" ration, it must, of necessity, be so in
" *every* part of duration, i. e. to all eter-
" nity: And the *man* ought for ever to
" be degraded, that the *brute* may be
" exalted."

BESIDES, this *injurious* representation of Human life not only involves in it all these absurdities, considered as a *speculative* error, but is attended with most pernicious consequences: Of which, as a sufficient specimen to shock a serious and considerate mind, I need only mention these three.—— That it weakens the principal argument,

argument, by which we can pretend to prove, ſolidly, the *difference* of moral good and evil; which argument is, " the na- " tural tendency of the *former*, at all " times, to happineſs, and of the *latter* to " miſery."——That it gives an *unbounded ſcope* to immorality and vice, where men are ſo unhappy as not to believe another ſtate of exiſtence hereafter —— And, finally, that it leſſens even the argument for a future ſtate, which it is intended to illuſtrate and diſplay in a ſtronger light; and, for the ſake of which, it ſo degrades and vilifies the *preſent* circumſtances of Human nature, and deſcribes virtue itſelf as little better than a capricious and arbitrary conſtitution, and an empty name.

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" FOR it is, principally, from what " we know of the *nature* of things in " *this* life, that we can draw juſt conclu- " ſions with reference to their *deſign* upon " the *whole*. Becauſe virtue, in what we " ſee of it here, appears to have a *tenden- " cy* to *happineſs*, we fairly preſume that " it was *originally* deſigned for happineſs." And as this deſign fails of being *executed*,

SERM. IX. very remarkably in *ſome* inſtances, and to a conſiderable degree in *all*, by many unavoidable events, againſt which we are unable to *guard* in the ſituation wherein we are now placed; we are led to expect, upon the beſt grounds of probability, that it will be *compleated* hereafter. "But "if we had no proof, from our experi- "ence and obſervation on facts, that vir- "tue was appointed to be the *ſource* of "Human happineſs, or, which amounts "to much the ſame, that the *ideas* of "virtue and happineſs, have in *nature*, "a *connexion* with each other; we ſhould "have much leſs reaſon to hope, than "we have at preſent, that the maker of "the world *intended* it for happineſs in "any ſcene of our exiſtence. And if it "was from itſelf, and from the original "laws of the whole conſtitution, more "*miſerable* than vice *here*; I can ſee no "clear medium by which to demonſtrate, "that it would not be *miſerable for* "*ever*."

THUS have I ſhewn how the account of the reward of virtue in this life has been *aggravated*, in order to demonſtrate its

its intrinſic excellence, and how far it has been *diminiſhed*, together with the preſent puniſhment of vice, to heighten the natural evidences of a future retribution. And now there only remain two things more, that are neceſſary to be inſiſted on, to finiſh what I intend upon this ſubject, and remove all the material difficulties relating to it. The FIRST is, to enquire what is the *true ſtate* of the caſe, in oppoſition to both the extremes above-mentioned; and then to ſhew, SECONDLY, that as this affords, on the one hand, convincing evidence of the *eſſential difference* of moral good and evil, by means of the *ſanctions* annexed to them *at preſent*; it alſo leaves the ſtrongeſt, and moſt cogent, probabilities of *a future* more exact and impartial recompence.

THE true ſtate of the argument, with reſpect to the *natural* rewards and puniſhments of virtue and vice in *this* life, will, I believe, be comprehended under the following heads.——FIRST, that virtue, in general, *tends* to the *happineſs*, and vice to the *miſery*, of mankind. SECONDLY, that the happineſs ariſing from virtue is of a

nobler

SERM. IX. *nobler* kind, and more *durable* in its nature, than any that can ſpring from ungoverned exceſſes. If ſelf-complacency, and ſelf-applauſe, be principal *ingredients* in the happineſs of every intelligent and reflecting being, *virtue* muſt tend to happineſs; and if ſelf-condemnation, ſelf-abhorrence, inward diſorder, remorſe, and ſhame, are the *neceſſary ſprings* of infelicity to the Human mind, vice muſt tend to *miſery*. And the happineſs of the former muſt, in itſelf, be as much more excellent than that of the latter, as *reaſon* is ſuperior to *ſenſe*, and *animal inſtinct*. From whence it plainly follows, in the THIRD place, that ſo far as the *natural* conſequences of virtue and vice are permitted *actually* to take place, the *ballance of happineſs* will undeniably lie on the ſide of virtue ——So far, I mean, as it reſults *properly* and *ſolely* from theſe two different methods of conduct, and is *abſtracted* from all extraneous and foreign conſiderations. To this, therefore, I may add, by way of corollary, "that "if we ſuppoſe the *outward advantages* "of health, fortune, and the like, to be "exactly *equal*, the pleaſures of the good "man,

" man, even here, may justly upon the " whole claim the *preheminence*." Besides all this, virtue is undeniably necessary to the good of mankind in general considered as a *community*, a *system* of creatures linked together by social affections and one universal interest; and, consequently, it must tend to advance the happiness of *every individual* in his *social* character; which is a very considerable, and indeed the chief, part of the *present* happiness of man. So that, in the FIFTH and LAST place, we may fairly lay down this as the sum and result of the whole, that if there were no future life it would still, in the common and regular course of things, be the *interest* of *all* mankind to be *virtuous*. And even in *extreme* exigencies, the case is not so much altered as may be generally imagined. For if a man secures his estate, or preserves his life, by *sinful* and *cowardly* compliances, the *shame* of having acted with so much *meanness* and *dishonour* may, to an ingenuous mind, be more intolerable than *tortures* or *death*. " There may " be such bitter and stinging remorse, " where there is no fear of *punishment*, arising

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"arising from a reflection on the *baseness* "of actions in themselves, as may render "*even an infidel* substantially and excessively miserable." And in this case I will venture to pronounce, that it would have been his *happiness* to be inflexibly honest, tho' *reproach*, *poverty*, and even *the loss of life*, were the certain and unavoidable consequence.

AND as the short and general account, which has now been given, proves, beyond all reasonable exception, that there is an eternal and immutable *fitness* in virtue, and *malignity* in vice; so, which is the next thing to be considered, it leaves the strongest probability, that can fairly be desired, of this great and important truth, that notwithstanding the rewards and punishment of moral good and evil that are interwoven, as it were, with the universal constitution of nature, there yet remains a future state of more adequate and *unexceptionable* retribution.

FOR, in the FIRST place, the evils and miseries to which *all* good men are exposed, from the common frailty of Human nature and general imperfection of the

the world, are sufficiently *numerous* to prevent their being *compleatly* happy; notwithstanding it be allowed, that the pleasures resulting from *integrity* are vastly superior to those false and polluted joys, which are derived from *vice* and *sensuality*.

SECONDLY, As virtue in this life can never of itself constitute *perfect* happiness, so there are cases supposable of intense pain and suffering, in which it can hardly be imagined to render existence here below, upon the whole, *eligible*; or, if barely eligible, no mark of the divine *delight* and *complacency* in virtue; nor what would be thought, by any one, a *suitable* reward of it. Should it be here said, that, in the most melancholy and deplorable circumstances that can be imagined, virtue will always make a man *more happy*, or rather *less miserable*, than its contrary: I answer, that this alone is not sufficient; "but it must render him more happy, if "no other recompence be intended, than "vice *is* or ever *will be* in any *possible* "circumstances." For if vice be, at any time, more happy than virtue, the conclusion, upon comparing the two cases together

SERM. IX. gether whatever they are, can be *no other* than this, "that *virtue* is punished, and "*vice* rewarded."

ADD to this, THIRDLY, that the natural good and evil consequences of virtue and vice are frequently *obstructed*, or *evaded*, in all which instances there is, properly speaking, *no* reward or punishment at all; and that they are neither so *remarkable* in themselves, nor so *universal*, nor so *certain* in the present life, as may reasonably be expected will *support* a firm and steady integrity under discouragements and oppressions, or counter-ballance the strong allurements of worldly honour and pleasure: And further, that there is a great variety of cases, in which the calamities of good men are *notorious*, but the reward of their virtue is not *seen*; and in which the outward advantages, which wicked men enjoy, are *conspicuous* and exceedingly *remarkable*, while the punishment of their vices is entirely *concealed* and *hid* from public observation.——And, in every case of this kind, the man of virtue will be so far from being distinguished by his *superior happiness*, that he will rather appear

to

to be the *miſerable* man. And conſequently one great end of rewards and puniſhments, if their be no future life, is entirely fruſtrated, which is this; to make ſuch a diſtinction between *all* inſtances of virtue and vice, as ſhall enforce the former, and diſcourage and reſtrain the latter; as ſhall excite to the one, and deter from the other, in every *kind* and in every *degree*.

IN the LAST place, notwithſtanding the proviſion of *leſſer* rewards and puniſhments in this life, yet if they are not *continued*, and diſpenſed more *regularly* and *equitably* in a future ſtate, "the *moſt virtuous* of mankind will *often* be the *leaſt* "rewarded, and the *moſt vicious* the *leaſt* "puniſhed." I rank thoſe among the *moſt virtuous*, who have taken moſt pains, and ſuffered the greateſt inconveniencies, for the advancement of religion, and the good of their fellow creatures; thoſe who bravely *ſuffer* and *die* in defence of virtue and liberty; and thoſe among the *moſt vicious*, who have ſo effectually ſtupified their natural conſcience of good and evil, as to be abandoned of all ſhame and remorſe. The *laſt* of theſe, it is plain, avoid

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avoid the worſt and moſt dreadful puniſhment of their vices *here*, by being hardened and inſenſible; and are much *leſs* miſerable, if there be no futurity, than ſinners of the very *loweſt* degree of guilt, who are ſubject to the anxious horrors of an alarmed and troubled conſcience. And, on the other hand, the generous *ſufferer* for truth, and for the welfare of mankind, is *leſs* rewarded, upon the whole, than another of *common* and far *inferior* virtue, who has not been expoſed to ſuch rigorous and ſevere trials.——And is not this *a demonſtration*, that there muſt be another life to rectify ſuch prodigious *inequalities* as theſe? Does not this *certainly* follow from admitting the exiſtence and perfections of God, and his righteous government of the moral world? Is there any *medium* between the *denial* of this principle and downright *atheiſm*? I think indeed there *cannot* be: And, moreover, that if it be *fit* to reward virtue, and puniſh vice, in *any* particular, it muſt be *fit* to do it, proportionably, in *every* particular; and that therefore the reaſoning here made uſe of plainly and ſtrongly enforces

enforces a future ſtate not only of *ſtrict* and *impartial* retribution ſo far as it goes, but of *univerſal* retribution. This ſeems to be moſt conſiſtent with the ideas of ſupreme wiſdom and goodneſs, and with the common principles of *equity*.

To conclude; the notion of a Deity, without a *Providence*, is utterly *inſufficient* as to all purpoſes of religion and morality; a Providence, with reſpect to *mankind*, is nothing, without *government*; nor government without *laws*; nor laws without univerſal, certain, and viſible *ſanctions*, adapted to the *entire caſe*, i. e. to the *capacities*, *ſituations*, *difficulties* and *weakneſſes* of the ſubjects, their *reluctance* to obedience, their *inward*, whether natural or acquired, *biaſſes*, and their *external* temptations to deviate from the rule of government: Nothing of which is here *adequately* provided for. The preſent is, upon the whole, a promiſcuous ſcene, of *irregular* and *confuſed* appearance; with very *indiſtinct* and *imperfect* traces of *diſtributive juſtice*: It can, therefore, be reaſonably conſidered in no other light, than as the *beginning* of the *firſt ſtep* towards, a more

SERM. IX. perfect rational existence, the *introduction* and *path* to immortality.——Otherwise, how little, by his vastly *precarious tenure* of life, is man advanced above the *flowers* of a day, and the *insects* and *animals* of a few months or years growth, and alternate *vicissitudes* of pleasure and pain! What a *trifle* is his dignity of nature! How *diminutive* his importance and rank in the creation?

SERMON

SERMON X.

The Advantages of Consideration.

HAGGAI i. 7.

—— Thus saith the LORD of Hosts, Consider your Ways.

THE duty, here recommended, is of such plain and universal obligation, and so immediately results from our very frame and constitution, that, one would think, there should be but little need of *motives* to urge to the practice of it.——Mankind, in all ages, have been particularly fond of the character of *rational*. They seem to talk of it with

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affectation, and in the most *magnificent* strain, as the high prerogative and glory of Human nature, its crowning excellence, its resemblance of the Deity, and the grand mark of its *preheminence* above the animal creation. And, surely, the *least* that can be expected from all this is, to find them employing their rational faculties in the pursuit of truth, in directing their conduct, and regulating their passions: And nothing can be more surprizing, than that, in defiance of their most *solemn professions* concerning the *dignity* of their intelligent nature, they are thoughtless and inconsiderate, giddy, rash, and unexperienced, immersed in sense, guided by fancy and appetite; and, oftentimes, as entirely destitute of *true judgment*, and serious reflection, as if they were *naturally* void of understanding.

BUT yet experience teaches us, that this not mere loose declamation, the effect of *peevishness*, *resentment*, and *contempt* of mankind; but, in a very great degree, the real state of the world. The encomiums they bestow on reason, which is but seldom consulted, are empty *compliments*, the workings

workings of *selfishness* and *pride*. They are fond of it as *a distinction* which flatters their *vanity*, and places them in an imagined point of *eminence*; but neglect to improve it to those valuable purposes for which it was chiefly intended, and which alone can demonstrate that it is any thing more than *a name*, and deserves to be called a *perfection*, or a *privilege*. And hence it is, that they employ their reason in difficult speculations, encourage it to grasp at things beyond the narrow extent of its capacity, to spy out, and correct, defects in the constitution of nature and course of Providence, and censure the operations of infinite wisdom: But at the same time that, forgetting its *weakness* and innumerable *errors* and *prejudices*, it takes upon it to *determine* right and wrong in cases that are absolutely *beyond* its comprehension, scarce any use is made of it within its *proper sphere*; viz. to trace out the principles and obligations of virtue and religion, fix the true rule of life, and judge of the nature and consequences of actions. And, by this preposterous abuse of it, we entirely lose the *honour* and all the *advan-*

SERM. X. *tages* of our rational frame: For it is not the *mere faculty* of reason, but the *right exercise* and *improvement* of it, that advances us above brute creatures; and if we suffer it to be *disordered*, *darkened*, and *controuled* by sensual excesses, and the influence of ungoverned passions, it becomes our greatest *reproach* and *infamy*, and must, in the final result of things, be a heavy aggravation of our *misery*.——I intend therefore, in the following discourse, to treat of the nature, reasonableness, and eminent advantages of *Consideration*, chiefly as it relates to *religion* and *morals*: Of Consideration, I say, which is the *great law* of Human nature, the first principle of *wisdom* and *good conduct*, and the spring of *resolution*, *steadiness* and *activity*, in all the duties of life; which will carry us, with safety and honour, through the most *difficult* and *intricate* circumstances; and the want of which will betray us into many fatal *irregularities*, and bring upon us *shame*, *remorse*, and *ruin*.

To *consider our ways* must include in it just *general* notions of religion, and of our duty in all its branches, and *whatever* has

has *a tendency* to prepare for *all* events, and make us behave regularly in *all possible* circumstances; and, consequently, a great *variety* of *reflections*, besides what relate to our *present*, or the examination and review, of our *past* conduct. Suffer me to point out some of the principal subjects, about which it becomes us to employ our meditations; in order to our acting, throughout the whole of life, as *men* and *christians*.

AND I shall begin with that, which is, in the nature of the thing, a *fundamental* enquiry; viz. what is the *grand intent* and *purpose* of *our being*. "If we survey the world around us, we shall find "that *every* creature, even the most *minute* and *inconsiderable*, is made for some "certain *determinate end*; and endowed "with *qualities* and *powers*, particularly "suited and adapted to it. And reason "immediately dictates, that there must be "*some especial* and *more exalted* end of "*man's* being; who has a *peculiar* nobleness and dignity of nature, and, in many "respects, eminent marks of *superiority* to "*all* the *other parts* of this lower creation."

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Now till this be clearly ſtated and determined, the mind will be in perpetual *uncertainty*; and all its notions, about the *true rule* of life and manners, can be nothing but *darkneſs* and *confuſion*. *How*, then, ſhall we adjuſt and ſettle this eſſential point, on which our knowledge of religion and morality ſo neceſſarily depends? Why by examining the *Human frame*, the *ſeveral parts* of which it is compounded, and, above all, what are its *characteriſtical* and *diſtinguiſhing* faculties. —— Are we formed *entirely*, or *chiefly*, for the gratifications of the *animal* life? "This *cannot* be, becauſe *ſenſe* and *appetite* we enjoy in *common* with the brutes; and, if we look *inward*, we ſhall find *reaſon*, *reflection*, *conſcience*, which muſt be the greateſt *abſurdities* and *monſters* in nature, if they are to be controuled and kept under by the *inferior* paſſions: Every thing above *ſenſe*, and the neceſſary *ingredients* for reliſhing the enjoyments of it, muſt, upon that ſuppoſition, be *miſhapen*, and *irregular*." And, therefore, as it cannot be denied, that we are *capable* of more

ſublime

sublime exercises, of more *pure*, *substantial*, and *durable* pleasures, *these* must, of necessity, be the *ultimate* end of our being: And whatever *other* principles there are in Human nature, which, if suffered to take their course, would be *inconsistent* with this great end, it must be the *office* of reason, if it has *any use at all*, to limit and restrain. ——Again, Are we formed for *selfish* views, to mind only *our own* affairs, and to be indifferent and careless about the *general state* of the world, any farther than our *particular interest* appears to be immediately concerned? "This likewise is *impossible*, "because we find *affections* of a *different* "nature, *universally* implanted in man-"kind, and *strongly* exciting to benefi-"cence, generosity and compassion."—— Or was it designed, that we should pass our time in *luxurious ease* and *indolence*, and dream away life in *sloth* and *inactivity*? "At this rate, *man* would be a be-"ing entirely *useless*, a kind of *blank* in "the creation;" which must be a most deplorable *perversion* of his nature, because he is evidently formed for *society*, and possess'd of *active powers* capable of *great* refinement,

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finement, and advances towards Godlike perfection, and of *extenſive* ſervice. —— Or, finally, Is the *preſent* ſtate the *only* ſcene of our exiſtence? Were we intended juſt to come on the ſtage of life, to ſhew what *higher attainments* we are fitted for, and then to *diſappear* for ever? "The "preſent exiſtence does not *look* like *an* "*entire ſcene*, but rather like the *infancy* "of Human nature; which is capable of "riſing to much greater *maturity*." And, beſides, as we are, in our very conſtitution, *moral* and *accountable*; and, in this world, there is ſo far from being a *ſtrict* and *impartial* retribution, that integrity and virtue frequently *ſuffer*, whilſt impiety, oppreſſion, and cruelty are *flouriſhing* and *triumphant*: All our *natural* notions of God's wiſdom, juſtice, and goodneſs, afford a high probability, that there is ſome *future* ſtate; in which ſuch an *univerſal* and remarkable diſtinction will be made between good and bad men, as the honour of the divine perfections and government ſeems, *neceſſarily*, to require. Theſe are plain and eaſy reflections, and, withal, of univerſal advantage: And when,

when, by serious Consideration, we are fully convinced that the present life is only *preparatory* for another infinitely more awful and important; that there is some *general law* of Human nature; and that there are *certain duties*, which *all* mankind are obliged to perform; the *next* step is to consider, more distinctly, what *these* duties are.

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AND, here, the *reason* of our minds will lead us to *begin* with the *duty*, which we owe to *God*. As he is a being of absolute and immutable perfection, he must, in general, be the *worthy* object of our *supreme* veneration and esteem. His infinite wisdom and power demand our *reverence*; his unexhausted and universal goodness our *devout* and *grateful adoration*. As he is our Creator, the fountain of being and happiness, our righteous governour and judge, and the sovereign disposer of all events, we are bound to *cultivate* a strong sense of our necessary *dependence* upon him; to *worship* him with humility and fervency; to be absolutely devoted to his *service*; to yield an exact and willing obedience to his *laws*; and *acquiesce*, with the

SERM. X. the most calm and profound submission, in *all* the determinations of his *Providence:* And, being a compleat and unspotted example of all *moral beauty* and *excellence*; it should be our chief *ambition* to be *like* him.

AGAIN, we find ourselves to stand *related*, not only to the *supreme first cause* of all, but to *various other* beings; particularly to beings of the same *rank* and *character*, formed with the same *passions*, encompassed with the same *infirmities*, and having the same *expectations* and *dependencies* with ourselves; who, all together, make up *one body* of *inseparable* interests: The next thing, therefore, to be considered is, what are the *general duties*, which we owe to *them*. And from our *original equality*, our *common* nature, circumstances, and wants, there necessarily results an *universal* obligation to equity, benevolence, and mercy.

BUT, to discharge the duty recommended in the text, we must go one step *farther* than this; and as there is a vast *difference* of circumstances and relations in Human life, take care to inform ourselves what

what those *dispositions* are, and what that *behaviour*, which are best *suited* to our *particular* situation and character.——Am I, for instance, in *exalted* and *affluent* circumstances? Let me consider, "whether "it *becomes* me to be dissolved in *effemi-* "*nacy*, and given up to *riot* and *extra-* "*vagance*, to be *insolent* and *tyrannical*, "or affect vain and useless *prodigality*;" or, on the contrary, to be *regular* and *moderate* in my desires, *gentle* and *easy* of access, to treat my *inferiors* with *condescension* and *humanity*, and employ my grandeur, wealth, and influence in acts of *generous compassion*, in communicating *relief* and *happiness* to the poor and miserable.——Am I *a parent?* What *course* must I take to *fulfil* the obligations of that character? "Shall I *neglect* the *minds* and "*manners* of my children, and, by my "sloth or profuseness, *abandon* them to "poverty and contempt;" or *form* them to just notions of things, *instill* into them good principles, *train them up* with a strict regard to piety, virtue, and decency, *watch over* them with an affectionate care, *guide* their rash and unexperienced youth by my superior

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ſuperior diſcretion, *diſpoſe* of them honourably in the world, and *provide* for them a comfortable ſubſiſtence? "Shall I *diſ-* "*courage*, and entirely *break*, the force "and ſprightlineſs of their tender ſpirits, "by a *rough* and *arbitrary* management," or *cheriſh* their reſolution and activity, and *engage* them to the love and chearful practice of their duty, by a winning *affability* and *freedom*? —— Or am I the *maſter* of a family: What are the *duties* that this relation requires? "Not ſurely to govern "with *rigour* and *inflexible* ſeverity, not "to leave *ſervants* to the *full ſwing* of "their irregular inclinations, not to *de-* "*bauch* their natural ſenſe of good and "evil, and *harden* them in wickedneſs, "by a vicious example; this is both un-"chriſtian and unnatural:" But to *temper* authority with mildneſs, treating them as *men*, tho' Providence, for wiſe reaſons, has placed them in an *inferior* and *dependent* ſtation, to *encourage* their good deſigns, in a friendly manner *admoniſh* them of their errors, and *lead them on* to virtue, to ſobriety, peaceableneſs, and fidelity,

lity, by *a constant face* of religion, justice, strict order, and harmony.

WE are to consider farther, in what manner it is proper for us to conduct ourselves, that our *virtues*, by being carried to an *excess*, may not degenerate into imperfections and blemishes; nor the *duties* of religion be made to *clash* and *interfere* with each other: "How, for instance, "to preserve the *dignity* of a character, "keep it above *contempt*, and secure the "*respect* that is *due* to it, and yet avoid "*pride* and *morosenes*; and to maintain "the *ballance* even between *generosity* and "prudent *frugality*, that the one may not "rise to *profusenes*, nor the other sink "into *avarice*." We should consider, likewise, not barely how we may *discharge* the immediate duties of our respective stations, but how to do it with the *most honour*, so as to recommend religion, and render our example amiable. For it is very possible that a man may act his part *well* upon the whole, and yet do it in such a *disagreeable* way, as to fall under a great deal of reproach and censure; by which, through the blind

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SERM. X. and undiſtinguiſhing prejudice of the world, *virtue* itſelf frequently *ſuffers:* But, on the contrary, "There is in the conduct of "others, a conduct for the *main* the ſame, "and in the ſame *ſcenes* of life too, a "*gracefulneſs* and *freedom*, and a certain "*nobleneſs* and *ingenuity* of temper, diſ-"covered, that makes them *ſhine* and be "*diſtinguiſhed* in all the offices of *ſocial* "life." And the conſidering *this*, together with the fixing the proper *bounds* of particular virtues, that *each* may keep its place, and not encroach upon the *reſt*; a right conſideration of theſe things, I ſay, is one of the principal branches of religious wiſdom, and, conſequently, of the duty which the text enjoins: And there is the more reaſon that it ſhould be *diſtinctly* inculcated, as it is the *very point*, in which the generality of mankind are notoriouſly defective.

ANOTHER moſt important ſubject of meditation is *death*, which *cloſes* the ſcene of our preſent exiſtence, puts an *end* to all our *worldly* projects, and *imaginary* ſchemes of happineſs. There is nothing that mankind, in general, have a greater

reluctance

reluctance and aversion to. The very thought of it *terrifies*; and therefore is diverted as much as possible, as too *awful* and *gloomy*, to make way for *gayer* and more *sprightly* images: And to this it is undoubtedly owing, that so many behave with so little *decency*, so little of manly *firmness* and *courage*, under the immediate apprehensions of it. If, without regarding the *consequences* of death, we consider it *only* as an *unavoidable* event, but at the same time *shocking to nature*, it is certainly our wisdom to render it *intimate* and *familiar* to the mind; that the *horrors* of it being diminished by frequent and *close* conversation with it, we may submit, with becoming resignation, to the appointment of an *all wise* providence the *universal law* of mortality. This will be an unspeakable happiness to *ourselves* in that critical hour, when every thing around us has a *melancholly* aspect, and the spirits are *faint* and *languid*; it is honourable to *human nature*, and represents it in a *worthy* and *advantageous* light; it has a natural tendency to *encourage* and *comfort* those that survive us, and inspire *them* with a gene-

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SERM. X. rous contempt of death. But, on the contrary, to be *unprepared* for what we know will certainly happen, and, for want of due reflection upon it, to meet it when it does happen with *trembling* and *confusion*, is an argument of weakness and pusillanimity; it debases the *dignity* of our nature, and makes it appear *despiseable*; it is a reproach to our *religion*, as if its principles were not *strong* enough to support us under those *special exigencies*, in which their influence is most desireable; and, withal, it tends to *dispirit* others, and to propagate and increase those *enslaving* fears, which render men absolutely unfit for *undertaking* and *accomplishing* many *noble* designs, of the utmost service to society. There is indeed a great deal in men's *natural* make and constitution: Some are of *bold daring* spirits, that scarce any thing can depress and controul; while others are of such *fearful* and *suspicious* tempers, as to be alarmed by every *imagination* of danger; and to such, it may be next to impossible to *compose* and *quiet* their minds, in the near views of a dissolution. But certain it is, that if any thing

will

will enable them to behave, in their last moments, with tolerable calmness and resignation, it is the *using* themselves to meditate on their departure hence, its *necessity*, and the *folly* of *repining* or *struggling* against fix'd and unalterable laws of providence; and, above all, on the glorious rewards of piety and true goodness in the future life, in comparison of which, all worldly glory and pleasure are insignificant and trifling.

BUT this leads me to mention *another* subject, that deserves our most deliberate and serious reflection, *viz.* the awful *consequences* of death. Not to contemplate these, with the greatest attention and concern, must argue unaccountable *stupidity*, and that we are hardened even against a sense of our own *true interest*. For the *future* state is the only *fixed* and *proper* scene of our happiness or misery; it therefore demands our *chief* regard, if we act merely on principles of reason and common prudence; and *this* life can be but of little importance, any otherwise than as, by the appointment of the wise author of nature, it is *connected* with and *preparatory* to it.

SERM. X. Besides our meditating, on the states of good and bad men hereafter, will furnish us with the most encouraging *motives* to the practice of religion and universal righteousness, and the most powerful *dissuasives* from vice and impurity: For we can none of us, surely, be so *rash* as to *resolve* to persist in dissolute courses, with shame and remorse, misery and ruin, *full* in our view. And nothing can so effectually *disarm* death of its terror, or administer such consolation and support in the prospect of it, as this thought, that it opens a passage for us into eternal life, and the enjoyment of blessedness and glory inconceiveable.

THE duty which the text exhorts to must imply in it, besides all this, a frequent *examination* and *review* of our conduct, to see how far it has *agreed* with the rule of life, and wherein it has been *defective*; and whether the *general principles*, on which we proceed, will continue to approve themselves as *right* and *sound* principles, as often as they are *scrutinised* and brought to the *trial*. There is the more need of this, "because *passion* and *prejudice* are apt to insinuate themselves, and "mix

"mix sometimes, *insensibly*, with our rea-
"sonings upon points of morality: So
"that *hasty* conclusions, which we made
"when we were in a *warm sanguine* tem-
"per, and mistook the strength of our
"*presumption* for a degree of *evidence*, are
"frequently *disallowed* by our more correct
"and improved judgment."—And besides, by taking this method, we shall approve ourselves to be persons of a clear and unexceptionable integrity; who are resolved to leave *no refuges* (not even *that* of *ignorance*) in which vice may *shelter* itself, and are only concerned for *truth* and *uncorrupted manners*.

ALL the subjects, hitherto proposed, are proper to employ our meditations as we are *men*: There are some others, peculiar to us as *Christians*. We are obliged, for instance, to consider the *grounds* of our religion, the intrinsic excellency of its doctrines, and the external evidence by which its truth and divinity are supported; that we may not be Christians by *chance*, from the mere force of *custom*, from an implicite regard to *tradition* and *human authority*, but from *judgment* and *deliberation*;

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which diſtinguiſhes *true faith* from *credulity* and *enthuſiaſm*, and is the only thing that can render it more *praiſe worthy*, tho' it may in its conſequences be more *uſeful*, than *infidelity* and *error*. We are likewiſe to conſider, and examine with care, the practical rules that Chriſtianity preſcribes, its precepts relating to piety, juſtice, charity, and temperance, which are the perfection, and moſt ſublime refinement, of *natural* religion; and the true nature, obligation, and *moral* tendency of its *poſitive* inſtitutions. To which we muſt add the *peculiar* motives, that our holy religion ſuggeſts, either to the practice of virtue in *general*, or to excell in any *particular* virtues; ariſing from the *clear diſcoveries* it has made of our duty, of the perfections of God, and, eſpecially, of his wonderful goodneſs in the redemption of mankind, but, above all, the *diſtinct account* which it gives of the future judgment, attended with a variety of engaging circumſtances, worthy the majeſty of God, and the excellent nature of the Human ſoul, and the whole calculated, in the

highest degree, to *strike* and *impress* our minds. SERM. X.

THUS have I shewn about *what things* it is necessary for us to employ our serious reflections, and would make this useful remark upon the whole; that though consideration *always* becomes us, and be of eminent advantage in *all* circumstances, yet there are *certain seasons*, in which it is peculiarly necessary. "As soon as we "attain to the *due* exercise of *reason*, and "set out in *moral* life, there should be *a* "*general solemn deliberation*, to *fix* the "principles and rule of our conduct; "which being *corrected* upon proper oc-"casions by our more *ripened* understand-"ing, and *altered* so as to suit it to every "change of condition, will enable us to "steer our course aright, and maintain a "regular and *consistent* character, amidst "all the temptations and difficulties to "which we are exposed." Again, consideration is especially necessary in the height of *prosperity*, which has a direct tendency to *dissipate* thought, and to *enervate* and *soften* the temper; that we may neither behave *insolently* through our pride

SERM. X. and vanity, nor be captivated by the bewitching charms of worldly *pomp* and *luxury*. It is neceſſary, likewiſe, in the fiery heat of *youth*; when the ſpirits are ſo gay and lively, and the paſſions ſo vehement and impetuous, that we are in danger, without *frequent exerciſes* of *ſedate* and *cool* reaſon, of being hurried into great indecencies. Finally, it is highly neceſſary on *ſudden* emergencies, in points of *ſingular* importance, and in all *perplexed* and *intricate* caſes. Something or other, of this kind, muſt have fallen within *every* man's experience: And, whenever it happens, if through a natural forwardneſs, or too fond an opinion of his own abilities, or an averſion to cloſe thinking, he comes to a *quick* and *haſty* concluſion; it may be attended with conſequences ſhameful and fatal to *himſelf*, and very injurious to his *fellow-creatures*.

I cannot think it needful for me to propoſe arguments, in *form*, to prove the *reaſonableneſs* of this duty, ſince it is, in truth, nothing elſe but the *exerciſe* of our *rational* powers, the diſcriminating property and privilege of Human nature, that advances

vances man above the lower creatures, which are guided by *sense* and *instinct*.—— "So that in the *proportion*, in which we "are destitute of *thought* and *reflection*, "we forfeit our *humanity*." Nor need I, after what has been said in the foregoing discourse, expatiate farther on the *advantages* of consideration; on which, very highly, our satisfaction in this world, and eternal peace and blessedness hereafter, depend. Every one must be convinced, that the want of *reflection* is a natural *source* of vice and disorder, and gives the passions an *unbounded* scope: For there is *nothing besides* that can *stop* their career, or *limit* their extravagance. And after *some time* spent in irregular indulgencies, which took their rise at first from an *inconsiderate* and *heedless* temper, the sinner becomes more *afraid* of *thinking*, for fear of alarming *conscience*, and filling his mind with *horror*. So that all his relief, all his tranquillity, springs from offering *violence* to *reason*, and *suppressing* its *friendly* admonitions: The *best* he can expect is, to be in an uncertain fluctuating condition; betwixt *self-approbation* and *dislike*, *hope* and *despair*,

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despair, *remorse* and *stupidity*. Whereas the great duty of consideration, *rightly* performed, will lead us *safely* through the dangerous *snares* of life; and if it does not prevent *little* failings and indiscretions, which are incident to *all* mankind from the natural *limitation* and *weakness* of their faculties, it will, at least, secure from all *gross* and *destructive* errors. And, to mention nothing more, our *virtues*, being the effect of a deliberate judgment, will be more *excellent* in themselves, and more *acceptable* to God; and the *mistakes* that still cleave to us after an honest inquiry, and a sincere use of means for better information, will be the more easily *pardoned*.

LET us all therefore be persuaded to the practice of a duty, which is of such absolute necessity and high importance; and declared to be the *will* of God, in the strongest manner, not only by the *Prophet* in the text, but in the very *contrivance* and *frame* of our nature. Let us *consider* our *ways*, and *shew ourselves men*, shew ourselves persons of *true discretion*, shew ourselves *Christians*; the *professors* of a religion,

ligion, which has not only preſſed it upon us, as a fundamental obligation, thus to anſwer the *deſign* of our intelligent frame, but has propoſed, to our ſerious thoughts, the moſt *grand*, and *noble*, and *uſeful* ſubjects, that the *mind* of man is capable of contemplating. In order to this, we muſt ſhake off *indolence*, "which "*firſt* deſtroys the *habit*, and, by *degrees*, "weakens the very *faculty* of thinking;" and not ſuffer our *paſſions* to gain too great an aſcendency over us, which, by *exceſſive* gratifications, "blind and confound "the underſtanding, and deſtroy our *re-* "*liſh* of *mental* pleaſures."——And may the merciful *Father of* our *ſpirits* ſtrengthen and confirm every good reſolution to *this* purpoſe; that we may conſider and *know the things that belong to our peace*, in *this* our *day*, before *they are* for ever *hid from our eyes*.

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Of the *Sabbath*, and the *moral* Ground of Public Worſhip.

EXODUS XX. 8, 9, 10, 11.

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days ſhalt thou labour, and do all thy work. But the ſeventh day is *the Sabbath of the LORD thy God*; in it *thou ſhalt not do any work: Thou, nor thy ſon, nor thy daughter, thy man-ſervant, nor thy maid-ſervant, nor thy cattle; nor the ſtranger that* is *within thy gates.*

For

For in *ſix days the LORD made heaven and earth, the ſea, and all that in them* is, *and reſted the ſeventh day: Wherefore the LORD bleſſed the Sabbath-day, and hallowed it.*

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THIS precept of the decalogue was inſtituted, with the ſame general view, as the three preceding, *i. e.* to maintain a lively ſenſe of the allegiance and veneration that were *ſolely*, and *immutably*, due to the ſupreme Lord over all, by a *ſtated* and *ſolemn* commemoration of the effects of his ſtupendous wiſdom and omnipotence, in the whole frame and diſpoſition of nature. From whence it plainly follows, that tho' the law itſelf, relating to the *Sabbath*, ſhould be allowed to be merely *poſitive*, or, in other words, not to be founded on the eternal reaſon and fitneſs of things, but to derive all its obligation from the *authority* and *will* of the legiſlator; and tho', in conſequence of this, its binding force as a divine law may not be

be *univerſal*, but limited to *particular* ſubjects; yet the end, for which it was enacted, is undeniably *moral*, and extends to *all* nations of the world *equally*, and to *all* mankind. So that whatever differences of opinion may ariſe about the day, the preciſe determinate *time*, that is to be kept in honour of the infinite and eternal Deity, they cannot in the leaſt affect the *natural* and *invariable* grounds of public worſhip; the *propriety* of which, reſulting from principles of *public* juſtice and gratitude, from the *relation* we ſtand in to God, and the *dependent* ſtate of our being, is, and ever will be, the *ſame*. The firſt of theſe therefore is, comparatively ſpeaking, a point of inferior conſequence; and to make it an article, that relates to the *eſſence* of religion, borders too nearly upon *ſuperſtition*. But the not attending *public worſhip*, or behaving, at the time when it is performed, with *irreverence* and an *indecent levity*, theſe, I ſay, in proportion to the *degree* of the neglect or the indecency committed, are *immoral* practices; and, as will be hereafter ſhewn, may be attended with moſt

injurious

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injurious consequences to the *virtue* and *good* of mankind.

BUT I cannot, in a discourse on the fourth commandment, confine myself to this most useful and momentous subject, but must explain the precept itself, and endeavour to fix distinctly the *bounds* of its obligation. Before I enter upon which, I beg leave to give a short paraphrase of this ancient law, that the true *meaning*, and ultimate *scope* of it, may be the more easily apprehended.

Remember the Sabbath-day, i. e. "the "day of *rest*," (which is the real meaning of the word *Sabbath*, and *all* that is implied in it) remember *the day* of *rest*, "which God hath commanded thee to "observe," *to keep it holy, i. e.* "*distin-* "*guished* from all other days as *a festi-* "*val* instituted in honour of him, and "*separated* from laborious and servile of- "fices." *Six days*, or "six days *only*," *shalt thou labour, and do all thy work*: "But thus it is not lawful for thee *to do* "on *the seventh day*, because it is *the* "*Sabbath of the LORD* thy God;" *in it*, therefore, *thou shalt not do any work, i. e.* "thou

" thou ſhalt not *follow* thy buſineſs, nor " *employ* thyſelf in thine ordinary occu- " pation, but works of abſolute *neceſſity* " for the preſervation and regular ſupport " of life, and acts of *charity* and *mercy*, " can never be ſuperſeded by any *poſitive* " law; theſe therefore thou art at liberty " to perform: For it would be moſt *ab-* " *ſurdly rigid* and *impious* ſuperſtition to " make the *Sabbath* a contradiction to " *nature*, and a *foe* to *humanity*. But, " with theſe neceſſary *exceptions*, the pro- " hibition is not limited to thine *own per-* " *ſon*, but reaches to all that are under " thine *authority* or influence;" to *thy ſon*, *thy daughter*, *thy man-ſervant*, and *thy maid-ſervant*, " and, from thoſe principles " of *lenity* and *mercy*, that utter abhor- " rence of *cruelty* which true religion al- " ways inſpires," to *thy* very *cattle*. " Nor " is the native *Iſraelite* only included, " but every *foreigner* who is permitted by " the laws to reſide amongſt you," *the ſtranger that is within thy gates.*——Thus you ſee, that the *whole* of the commandment itſelf relates to nothing elſe but a day of *mere reſt* from ſecular employment

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and bodily labour, without any *explicit declaration*, at leaſt in this moſt ſolemn exhibition of it, that it was *originally* conſecrated, among the *Jews*, to any *other* or *higher* purpoſes of religion. And I deſire that this may be particularly noted, becauſe I ſhall have occaſion to mention it again as a circumſtance of great weight, to *juſtify* the almoſt univerſal practice of *Chriſtians* in not ſolemnizing the day of the *Jewiſh* Sabbath.

AND this *general idea* of the principal view and ſcope of the precept is not at all contradicted, but rather moſt evidently demonſtrated to be the juſt and true idea of it, by the *reaſon* aſſigned as the ground of the appointment of this holy feſtival. ——*For* in *ſix days the LORD made heaven and earth, the ſea, and all that in them* is, *and reſted the ſeventh* day ("not as if his "omnipotence, which could have framed "the univerſe in *an inſtant* as eaſily as in "ten thouſand years, was *fatigued*, and "ſtood in need of a *relaxation*; this, I "ſay, cannot poſſibly be the ſenſe of the "expreſſion; it muſt therefore only mean "that he *ceaſed* from creating on the *ſe-*

"*venth*

" *venth* day, every thing being already " *compleatly executed*, according to the " exact *model* which his infinite wisdom " had contrived :)" *Wherefore*, " not " because there was any *necessary connex-* " *ion*, in the nature of things, between " his having finished the works of crea- " tion in *six* days, and the religious cele- " bration of the *seventh* as a day of *rest*; " but to answer a valuable purpose, which " might fitly take its *rise* from hence, he " did, by *positive* institution, and an act " of his supreme *authority*," *bless the Sabbath-day, and hallow*, or sanctify, *it*.

THE substance of this command plainly relates to the sanctification of the *seventh* day, and of that *alone*. And the *reason* by which it is enforced neither is, nor can *possibly* be, an enforcement of any thing else, but of an observation of the *seventh* as *a day* of sacred rest. For, most surely, God's *resting* the *seventh* day can be only an argument to *rest* the *same* day, according to the *order* which we observe in our *computation* whatever it be; " and " not for our resting on the *first*, *fourth*, " *sixth*, or *no* determinate day within the

SERM. XI. "*seven.*" So that if this law be still *in force*, our neglecting the *seventh*, and confining our *social* worship of the Deity to the *first*, day of the week is altogether unjustifiable. It is therefore of great importance to enquire *how far* the obligation of this law extends; whether to *mankind* in general; or to *Christians* in particular, as acknowledging the divinity of the *Mosaic* dispensation, and the authority of the books of the *Old Testament*; or whether it terminated only in the *Hebrew* nation. The last of these I apprehend to be the case; and shall endeavour to prove that it is neither an *universal* law, nor a necessary branch of *Christian* duty, to *remember the seventh day* of the week *to keep it holy*. And in what I have to offer, I shall proceed in a regular and gradual method, that every part of the argument may be the better understood, and the whole appear in its true light.

IN the FIRST place, then, I would observe, that the fourth commandment, which enjoins the religious celebration of the *seventh* day, "is not a part of the "*moral* law." For if so, there must be an

an indiſputable reaſon, in the *abſtract nature* of the thing itſelf, which diſtinguiſhes *this* day from *all* others; and a reaſon too, that may be *univerſally* known without the help of *revelation*; becauſe points of unchangeable morality are thoſe *only*, which are diſcoverable by *nature*'s light, and would have obliged *all* mankind, if they had not been made the ſubjects of any particular laws.——But will any one pretend to ſay, that the *ſanctification* of the *ſeventh* day would have been *a neceſſary duty* of religion, if God had never *interpoſed* and *commanded* it to be ſanctified? Or, that it was a duty *originally*, and *always*, obvious to every human underſtanding? Or that the moſt remote *Heathen* nations, amongſt whom no traces can be found of the *Moſaic* account of the creation of the world, were capable of finding out, merely by their *reaſon*, that *in ſix days the LORD made heaven and earth*, and that therefore the *ſeventh* muſt be *a holy ſabbath*, devoted to the ſolemnities of religion? Theſe things are ſurely too abſurd to be aſſerted; and yet they ought not only to be aſſerted, but

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plainly *demonstrated*, as the only *possible* foundation on which it can be admitted, that the fourth commandment relates not to a matter of *instituted* and *alterable*, but of *moral* and *eternal*, duty: *i. e.* It must be demonstrated, tho' it be almost in terms a *contradiction*, that tho' the *reason* assigned, for the appointment of the Sabbath, could never have been *known* but by the help of *revelation*, yet the *duty* of observing the seventh day, which is entirely grounded on this naturally *undiscoverable* reason, might have been *found out* by the *bare unassisted* faculties of the Human mind. Whereas, on the contrary, nothing is more self-evident than this, that where there neither does, nor *can*, appear to be any *ground* of obligation, no obligation either does, or can, *subsist*.

BUT perhaps it will be said, that wherever the *reason* assigned for the sanctification of the *Sabbath* is plainly proposed, its *moral* and *universal* obligation may from thence be fairly deduced. How I ask does that appear?—— God's *resting* from the work of creation, on the seventh day, is an expression most manifestly *figurative*;

rative; and can *unalterable rules* of morality be inferred from *figures*, and *peculiar idioms* of ſpeech? Reduce it to its plain and natural meaning, and it can ſignify nothing more than this, that the great God, the author of nature, created the heavens, and the earth, and the ſea, and the infinite variety of creatures contained in them, within the compaſs of *ſix* days; and therefore of courſe, his whole ſcheme being compleatly finiſhed and *abſolutely perfect*, ceaſed from the work of creation on the *ſeventh* day. But would it *therefore*, if our ſupreme governour had never *commanded* it, have been our *natural* and *inviolable* duty to have kept *holy* the *ſeventh* day? What *neceſſary* connexion is there in *reaſon*, abſtracted from, and independent on, the *poſitive* will of God, "between his having *compleated* the making of the world in *ſix* days, and the "*religious obſervation* of the *ſeventh*?" And if there be no ſuch *neceſſary* connexion, as moſt certainly there is not, the law of the decalogue, which declares the *holineſs* of this particular day of the week above others, cannot belong to the

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clafs of *moral* laws; the precife notion of which is, " that they bind *all* mankind, " unalterably, on account of their *origi-* " *nal intrinfic* fitnefs, and not in virtue " of the *authority* of the legiflator, and " his exprefs *conftitution.*"

I WOULD not be fuppofed, by any thing which I have now offered, to infinuate, that what the Almighty and fupreme Lord has been pleafed to affign as a *reafon*, for his *pofitive* inftitution of the feventh-day Sabbath, was not a *good* and *folid* reafon; nor does the courfe of the argument afford the leaft colour for fuch an inference. " For that may be a juft " reafon for his *ordaining* the obfervation " of it, which would not have been fuf- " ficient to make our *voluntary* obfer- " vance of it, without his direct command, " an *indifpenfable duty* of religion and " *moral* piety. There are undeniably *wife* " reafons for appointing *Baptifm* and the " *Lord's-fupper* in the *Chriftian* church, " as there were, likewife, for enjoining " the practice of *circumcifion* among the " *Jews*; But is the law of *circumcifion*, " or

" or the law of *baptiſm*, upon this ac-
" count, to be deemed a *moral* law? To
" aſſert this is utterly to confound the
" *diſtinction* between *moral* and *poſitive*;
" and in effect to declare, that *all* the
" commands of God, becauſe they have
" their foundation in juſtice and wiſdom,
" are equally *moral*." This, indeed, is a ſtrong reaſon why *poſitive* laws ſhould be ſtrictly and conſcientiouſly obeyed, as well as thoſe of a *higher* nature; but ſtill they muſt be allowed to differ, from laws which are properly and abſolutely *moral*, in this very material circumſtance, that they are *all repealable*. And this is the firſt natural ſtep in our reaſonings upon the preſent ſubject, and the ground-work of all that is to follow, *viz.* that the precept, which enjoined the celebration of the *ſeventh* day as a ſacred reſt, cannot be ranked among the eternal *irreverſible* rules of morality: From whence theſe conſequences immediately and directly flow—
" That it is not an *univerſal* law extending
" to all mankind —— that its *obligation*
" muſt of courſe ceaſe, when the parti-
" cular *end* ceaſes, for which it was in-
" ſtituted

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"ſtituted——and that it may at any "time be *entirely abrogated*, or abrogated "as to the *particular day* only, by the "ſame authority that *enacted* it."

I NOW proceed to another obſervation, and that is, that as the fourth commandment has been clearly ſhewn not to be obligatory as a *moral* precept; ſo it has no force at all at preſent, with reſpect to *men* in general, or *Chriſtians* in particular, merely as it was delivered from mount *Sinai*, and made a part of the *Moſaic* conſtitution; becauſe *no laws* can poſſibly oblige any, to whom they were not *given*; and therefore *that* law of the decalogue being only enjoined on *a certain people* (who are *ſpecially* deſcribed and characterized as a people *brought out of the land of Egypt, out of the houſe of bondage*) it can, as ſuch, bind *no other* people, *no other* particular perſons beſides them. And, farther, if *any* precept whatſoever be of *preſent* authority, *merely* as it belonged to the *Moſaical* diſpenſation, *every* precept which was delivered of God to the *Jews*, by the miniſtry of *Moſes*, muſt have the ſame authority. On the other hand, if it be

be not allowed to derive its obligation from its having been anciently a divine *Jewiſh* law, it muſt now have no weight at all, but either as a *moral* precept (which we have already ſeen it *cannot* be) or as it has been recommended and enforced *anew* by the *Chriſtian* religion.

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HERE then, in the THIRD place, the hinge of the whole argument turns, and by this it muſt be finally decided. For a *moral* law it is not; as a law communicated to the *Jews* it has no force; if therefore it be not an *inſtitution* of the goſpel, there is no imaginable reaſon left to ſupport its *obligation*; and upon *Chriſtian* principles, it can, in theſe latter ages of the world, be neither a branch of *natural* nor of *revealed* religion. And the mere *ſilence* of the goſpel with reſpect to it, when it is deſtitute of *every other* ground of *preſent* obligation, muſt amount upon the whole to much the ſame, as if it was, in *formal* and *explicit* terms, declared to be totally and for ever *abrogated*.

THERE are ſeveral other topics, from whence, I apprehend, the ſame point might be concluſively argued; which to avoid

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avoid prolixity, and from the little desire I have to engage in *controversy*, I shall but slightly mention.——And the FIRST is, that the *Sabbath*, enjoined in the fourth commandment, is entirely different from what those *Christians*, who maintain the *holiness* of the *seventh* day of the week, contend for; *their* Sabbath being a day of *religious worship*; the *Jewish*, as far as can be gathered from the words of the *precept itself*, only a day of *rest*. For there is no mention made either of *prayers*, or *moral discourses*, or *reading the scriptures* (if *any* of these holy books were at *that time* written;) of which exercises we likewise find scarce any *traces*, in the history of the *Jews*, till the establishment of their *synagogue-worship*; which, as I apprehend, was merely a *prudential*, and not a *divine* institution. And this day of rest seems to have been nothing more than a festival day in honour of the self-existent Deity; to maintain a reverent sense of *the maker of heaven and earth*, *i. e.* of the *true* and *living* God; this being his characteristical distinction, in many passages of the Old Testa-

Teſtament, from *unſubſtantial* and *idol* Deities. So that as the precept does not appear to have been calculated for the purpoſes of *religion at large*, but adapted to the *ultimate view* of the *Hebrew* conſtitution, which was to guard againſt *idolatry*; and as *ſervants* in theſe eaſtern countries were *ſlaves*, and uſed with much greater *ſeverity* and *oppreſſion* than in modern times (upon which account, in the circumſtances of that age, it might ſerve peculiar purpoſes of *humanity* as well as *piety*) it is, at leaſt, highly probable, that the Jewiſh *ſeventh*-day Sabbath was intended to be *confined* to that nation only, and not to continue in *force*, when the public ſtate of the world was altered.

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To which we may farther add, that St. *Paul*, in particular, has repreſented the *religious* obſervation of *days*, as well as the diſtinction between clean and unclean *meats*, to be quite alien from the *free* and *liberal* ſpirit of Chriſtianity; and, conſequently, under that more *rational* and *refined* inſtitution, as a thing entirely needleſs, and an inſtance of *ſuperſtitious* ſcrupuloſity. And as he has done this in moſt

univerſal

SERM. XI. *universal* terms, without making, or so much as intimating, a *single* exception, and had an undoubted reference to the customs of the *Jews*; either every day which they observed as *holy*, and of consequence the *seventh* day of the week, or *no* particular day at all must be included in that representation: And then it must be a *general* remark, which, by allowing the exclusion of every *particular*, can have no weight or meaning in it.

BUT to come to the principal point of all, the whole debate is in my opinion absolutely, and beyond contradiction, decided by the following passage; *Let no man judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath* days: For, in these words, the following things are most evidently either asserted, or implied.—FIRST *absolutely*, and without any *restriction* at all, that no man is to be *judged*, *i. e. censured* and *condemned*, for not thinking it his duty to observe *Sabbath* days.—— SECONDLY, that the observation of these *Sabbaths* was therefore, under the gospel, a matter of *perfect indifference*: For if the neglect

Coloss. ii. 16.

neglect of it had been *a violation* of any command of God still *subsisting* and *in force*, it *might* and *ought* to have been condemned.——THIRDLY, the *reason* why the non-observer of the *Sabbaths*, as well as of the *new moon*, was not to be charged with *irreligion* is distinctly assigned; *viz.* that they were *shadows*, or prefigurations, of *good things to come* under the kingdom and government of the *Messiah*, and therefore, that kingdom being *actually* erected, they must of necessity give place to the *substance*, which they were intended darkly to represent—FOURTHLY, the word *Sabbath* days is an universal term, that must comprehend under it *every* Sabbath which is not particularly *excepted*, or else the scriptures and all writings are unintelligible: But the *seventh* day of the week is not particularly excepted, and therefore the solemn consecration of it cannot, among *Christians*, be a necessary office of *piety*——I shall add but one thing more, which is, that there is the utmost probability to induce us to believe, that by *Sabbath* days in this text the *weekly Sabbath* was more especially intended; because wherever the

word

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word is uſed, it ſeldom ſignifies any thing elſe in the writings of the *New* Teſtament; and never *once* any *other* of the Jewiſh *Sabbaths*; and when, in the *Old* Teſtament, it is joined with *feaſts* and *new moons*, it has generally the ſame import, and was deſigned to ſpecify the *ſeventh-day* Sabbath, *diſtinct* from all others.

I EXPECT that it will be here urged, that the law of the *Sabbath* is as *old* as the creation, and, of courſe, muſt be diſtinct both from the *judicial* and *ceremonial* laws of the *Jews*; that being *coeval* with Human nature itſelf, it may reaſonably be ſuppoſed to reſpect *all* mankind; or, at leaſt, *all* in every country, and in every age, who, by the light of *revelation*, are *acquainted* with the account which *Moſes* gives of the creation of the world —— To which I anſwer, that it is not *expreſsly* affirmed by *Moſes*, that the Sabbath was inſtituted from *the beginning*, and to be obſerved by *Adam* in paradiſe; but his words are fairly capable of a different ſenſe. What the hiſtorian ſays (*viz.* that *God bleſſed the ſeventh day, and ſanctified it, becauſe that in it he had reſted from*

Gen. ii. 3.

all

all his work, which God created and made) may only be by way of *anticipation*; and have a reference to a law, that was not enacted till ſome ages afterwards. This would be eaſily underſtood by that people, for whom the writings of *Moſes* were *originally* and more *immediately* deſigned; and the thing itſelf is conſiſtent with the ſtricteſt propriety of hiſtorical narration. For ſuppoſe that an earthly prince ſhould, at the diſtance of *many years*, inſtitute *a feſtival* in *commemoration* of a ſignal and grand event; the hiſtorian, who writes his reign (notwithſtanding the *inſtitution* did not immediately follow the *fact*, the memory of which was deſigned to be perpetuated by it) may juſtly ſubjoin a *general* mention of it to his account of the event itſelf; tho' he intends likewiſe to inſert it in its *proper* place, and give it, there, a more *minute* and *full* deſcription. And this is not only a *poſſibility*, but ſeems to be, by far, the moſt *probable* account of the caſe, ſince in the whole hiſtory of the *religion* of the *Patriarchs*, nay in all the writings of *Moſes* about events that happened before the

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commencement of the *Hebrew* polity, there is not ſo much as the moſt diſtant *hint* of a Sabbath *obſerved*, or *known*; tho' after the giving of the law, both *Moſes*, and the ſubſequent Prophets, abound in paſſages either enforcing the *obſervance* of it, or complaining of its *prophanation*. This exactly ſuits with the *later* date of its being originally a *Judaical* law; but is very hard, if not impoſſible, to be reconciled with its being a law in force from the *creation*. Allowing, however, that it was ſo, the concluſion, upon the whole of the argument, will be much the ſame. For if the words of St. *Paul* above-cited amount to an *abrogation* of the ſeventh-day *Sabbath*, as it ſtands in the *fourth* commandment, they muſt, with equal weight, *abrogate* this pretended more *ancient* and *primitive* Sabbath; becauſe both the *ſubſtance* of the precept, and the *reaſon* aſſigned for it, are preciſely the *ſame* in both inſtances, without any *variation* even in the minuteſt article. If therefore it has *ever* been *repealed*, the very *ſelf-ſame* individual command cannot remain *unrepealed*: And to ſuppoſe, what is

exactly

exactly the *same* in *all* particulars, to be *annulled* as it is mentioned in the book of *Exodus*, but to retain its *obligation* as it is inserted in the book of *Genesis*, is to make the supreme government of almighty God a reign of *capriciousness*, and not of *wisdom*.

BUT what, it may be asked, is the consequence of all these reasonings? —— Is it that we are to allot *no* time for public worship? Are there no *public* honours, no *social* duties, to be paid to the Father of mankind, to the supreme and universal governour —— Undoubtedly there are: *Nature* itself directs to it, independent on any law of *revealed* religion, or any arbitrary or *alterable* constitution: And both the *ground* of *public worship* in general, and the *reason* of the appointed seasons of *Christian* worship, are either immutable dictates of nature, or will at least approve themselves to the calm and impartial judgment of all considerate men.

For, FIRST, the *public* worship of the Deity is, in the general consideration of it, most undeniably of a *moral* nature; "or, "in other words, the *propriety* and *uses* of

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" it may be argued upon principles of " *reason* only, abstracted from all *know-* " *ledge*, or any *supposition*, of a revela- " tion given."

THE *worship* of God, implying in it an acknowledgment of his supreme perfection, of our necessary dependence upon him, and infinite obligations to him, is as much a dictate of *eternal* morality, as are the most indispensable offices of *justice* and *beneficence*. The *one* as *directly* results from the relations of *creatures* and *beneficiaries* to their Creator and gracious Sovereign, as the *other* from the mutual and indissoluble relations, in which fellow-creatures stand to each other. " It " is therefore as *fit* for us to *unite* in acts " of *piety*, as in the support of justice, " or the promotion of common good."

ADD to this, that *public communities* and *bodies* of men, as *such*, are *equally* under the protection and superintending care of the Deity, as the *individuals* which compose them. " As collected in " society, they are of a *distinct* conside- " ration from the individual members of " society; they have distinct *wants*, dis- " tinct

" tinct *dependencies*, diſtinct *mercies*; which SERM.
" ought therefore to be all *ſeparately*, *i. e.* XI.
" in *ſocial* worſhip, acknowledged:" They have publick *crimes* which demand a public humiliation, and public *miſeries* deſerved, which ought, in *reaſon*, to be deprecated.

AGAIN, *ſocial worſhip* is a natural means of keeping alive *a general veneration* of God, which is one of the principal ſupports of government, and of the external peace and order of the world. It ſeems to be, indeed, in a great meaſure neceſſary to preſerve the very *ſenſe* of the Deity; the bulk of the world having either ſo little inclination, or capacity, or leiſure for thinking, that, without *a public remembrance*, God himſelf might not be *in all their thoughts*. For if ſo ſmall, ſo very ſmall, a proportion of *piety* be found amongſt mankind, tho' they enjoy, at ſtated ſeaſons, the advantages of public worſhip; what may we naturally preſume would be the conſequence (judging by the ordinary courſe of things in *other* inſtances) without this help, but that a general *ignorance* and *barbarity* would be

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introduced? Besides *a public union*, in offices of religion, is an *honour* to it, and *guards* the worship of God in general from the attacks of Atheists and professed libertines; who, if it was observed only in *single characters*, might the more easily bring disgrace upon it, and banish it out of the world; and, by that means, deprive all the social virtues of their most substantial *defence*; and so throw *Human nature* into disorder (defacing all marks of its dignity) and *Human society* into confusion.

LET me further add, that the *united* devotion of a whole assembly has a natural tendency to animate the *zeal* and *piety* of each particular member of it; that public worship, in which we more immediately celebrate a *common* Father, and offer reverence and homage to a *common universal* Governour, strengthens *social* affections, and enforces the principle of *benevolence* to mankind: And all these uses, these eminent and signal advantages, of social piety will be, in the main, the *same* in *every* supposeable condition of men; whether *innocent*, or *degenerate*; whether

whether *with* or *without* a revelation; and, conſequently, cannot reſult from any mere *poſitive* appointment, which neceſſarily *preſuppoſes* a revelation, but muſt ſpring from *nature* itſelf, and be raiſed on a *moral* ground.

WHAT has been hitherto ſaid relates to the worſhip of the Deity, in the ſtrict and proper ſenſe of the word. And as for *public inſtructions*, they are undeniably uſeful to ſupport the *honour* of virtue, and expoſe the *malignity* of vice, to impreſs an *efficacious* ſenſe of morality, to correct *public* enormities, to *fortify* good reſolutions, to *guard* againſt the dangerous ſnares of life, and *explain* the unchangeable rules of piety and virtue to the *unthinking* and *inconſiderate* —— the *great multitude*, vaſtly the majority in *all* nations; "that they may retain ſomething INTERNALLY *human*, *rational*, "and *ſocial*, and not degenerate into mere "*ſavages* with the *external* form and im-"preſſions of humanity."

SHOULD it be ſaid, that theſe public inſtructions may indeed be very *expedient* for the *vulgar*; but that they are abſo-

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lutely *needless* with respect to persons of *reflection*, and more *refined* thought: I answer, that this is a distinction, under the cover of which, almost *every* man may excuse himself from *attending* on the public solemnities of religion. For who *is* the *wise* man, if every man is to be *his own* judge, who will be *voted* the wise man that stands in *no need* of moral direction, but *himself*? Allowing, however, this plea of *vanity* to pass for the present; most certainly, public lectures on piety and morality may bring important truths to the *remembrance* of the *wisest*. They may represent them in *a light*, in which they themselves *never* considered them; and in a light too, that is the most *adapted* to their peculiar temper, and, consequently, the most likely to *excite* their good affections. *New* thoughts, of considerable moment, may also be suggested; *no* man having the absolute comprehension of any subject. Every one, in the present state of imperfection, stands in need of *all* helps to *improve* his piety: Every member of society is *equally* obliged, whatever his *real* improvements, or

his

his own thoughts of his improvements, are, to join in thoſe reverent, humble, and grateful acknowledgments of the Deity, which are founded on the *natural wants* and *obligations* of ſociety. And, finally, his *example* may influence others, to whom the ſolemn offices of public worſhip are allowed to be of *uſe*; and may therefore, in its *effects*, be exceedingly detrimental to the cauſe of virtue, and the everlaſting good of mankind. So that this is a tye, from which none can rationally plead an *exemption*, whatever his character and ſituation in the world be, or his *proficiency* in moral knowledge.

THIS, which has been already argued, is the foundation and ſupport of all, and what remains will naturally and eaſily follow. "For an *obligation* to maintain "public worſhip neceſſarily infers, or "rather involves in the very idea of it, "an obligation to devote and conſecrate "*ſome time* to public worſhip." The inſtitution of *one* day in *ſeven* has been found, by experience, not to be attended with the leaſt inconvenience to the rights and common intereſts of mankind: For if there had

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had been *any* inconvenience, it muſt have been *felt*, it muſt have been *complained of* in every age; but no ſuch *ſenſe* appears, no ſuch *complaints* have ever been made. From whence we may draw this certain concluſion, that this is a *portion* of time, againſt which there can be no ſolid exception. On the contrary, the obſervation of it is ſupported, and, I think, with great evidence of reaſon, by the following remarks: That one day in ſeven may be moſt advantageouſly employed in *recollecting* ourſelves; and impreſſing an habitual and lively ſenſe of *religion* upon our minds —— that it is as *little*, almoſt, as can be allowed for the improvement of our underſtandings and our morals; for *eaſe* and *refreſhment* to our ſervants; for reſt to our *cattle*; and, conſequently, for ſubſerving the two grand purpoſes of *piety* and *mercy*; which are ſtrictly united, and always inſeparable. That the firſt day of the week, in particular, is recommended to us, for the celebration of religious offices, by *Apoſtolic example*, and by that of the primitive Chriſtians —— that their *collections* for the poor were made

upon

upon that day; which ſeems to imply, that it was the *general ſtated* ſeaſon of their aſſembling for public worſhip —— And, in itſelf, no day could be ſo proper for the ſolemnities of *Chriſtian* worſhip, as that of our Lord's reſurrection, that grand and *deciſive* event, on which the truth of Chriſtianity, and all the exalted hopes and glorious proſpects, which we derive from thence, neceſſarily depend.

I SHALL only add, that in the preſent circumſtances of the *Chriſtian* world, if men refuſe to join in the religious obſervation of this day, they lay themſelves under a kind of neceſſity, in moſt places at leaſt, of neglecting public worſhip altogether; by which omiſſion, they will not merely contradict the ſuggeſtions and intimations of *revealed* religion, but (as has been before largely ſhewn) the dictates of *nature* and *reaſon* itſelf.

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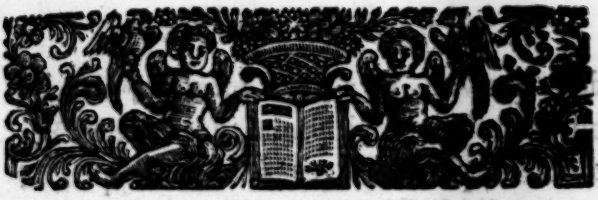

SERMON XII.

Religion a consistent and uniform Character.

MATTH. vi. 24.

No man can serve two masters: For either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other.——Ye cannot serve God, and Mammon.

ALL general maxims, like that contained in the text, must not only be justly and distinctly stated, and by serious reflection rendered habitual to the mind; but their influence does

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does likewise, in a great measure, depend on their being fairly and impartially *applied* to particular cases that happen in human life. If a man examines his own conduct by these rules, with no other view than to *learn* what is right, and with an honest resolution to *adhere* to it; they will help him, without much difficulty, to form a just judgment of himself, and to regulate all his errors. But without this, he can hope to proceed no farther than the mere *abstract* theory and speculation of virtue; which will be of very little real advantage to him.——In observations that are not *expressly* directed, nor by a *proper accommodation* suited, to particular characters, we are all of us too apt to conclude that we have no *concern*.

AND hence it arises, that the rule which our blessed Saviour has prescribed in the text, tho' it be frequently read, and assented to, without the least hesitation, as containing some *general* truth, yet makes but a faint, lifeless, and *ineffeacious* impression upon the generality of mankind; who would fain perswade themselves, that they can, at the same time,

lay

lay up treasures both *on earth* and *in heaven*, and render all *due* veneration and homage to the Deity, while their affections are *intensely* and *ultimately* fixed on inferior objects: As if they thought, that two distinct and *opposite* interests might be reconciled and united in *their practice*, tho' such a union be absolutely *impossible*, and a downright *contradiction*, in *reason*, and the *unchangeable nature* of things.

VICIOUS and corrupt excesses, of all kinds, are never so *dangerous*, as when they are made to contract an *alliance* and sort of *friendship* with virtue, and indulged, as it were, upon *principle*. When a man has *entirely* obliterated his natural sense of good and evil, and is become a *cool speculative* libertine, there is scarce *any ground* for a rational hope, that he will ever be *reclaimed* from his irregular and licentious courses; because he has lost all the *natural seeds* of piety and moral goodness, the *first* and *necessary* principles of amendment of life. And the case seems to differ but *little*, if he has so far debased his notions of religion, as to suppose that worldly-mindedness and the extravagant

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travagant pursuits of carnal pleasure are *consistent* with it; and has found out a way in which, as he vainly imagines, he may be a sincere worshipper and servant of God, while he remains the slave of base and inordinate passions. For, in this instance, the sense of religion which he still retains is entirely *useless* to him; it amounts to just the same, with respect to its *influence*, as if he was a professed and thorough-paced infidel: And while the delusion, of which I am now speaking, continues, it is next to impossible that he should feel in himself any one *motive* to reform; or frame a *general intention*, or so much as entertain a *remote thought* of it; because he *approves* of those disorders in his temper and conduct, which, unless they are clearly seen, condemned, and deeply lamented, must remain for ever *incurable*.

IT is indeed extremely surprising, that mankind who are endowed with reason, and who *boast* of their reason too, should study, and take great pains, not to inform, but to *impose* upon their understandings, and *cloud* their inward light; nay, further, that they should be most fond

fond of being *deceived*, and of evading the force of *truth* in those points, that are undeniably of the highest consequence: As if blindness of mind, and insensibility of danger, were *especially* to be *desired* in such cases, where an error must of necessity be *fatal*. Trifling and inconsiderate creatures! whose own conduct reproaches and condemns itself.——In affairs, in which their worldly interest is concerned, an *animal*, *groveling*, *momentary*, and *precarious* interest, they are *cautious* and *diffident*; but with respect to religion, a life of reason and moral rectitude, and the welfare of their souls to all eternity, *rash* and *credulous*. In the former case they *deliberate*, and weigh *discreetly*, and *minutely*, every circumstance; in the latter they are either afraid of *thinking* at all, or venture their whole interest upon *occasional* and *superficial* reflections. These, wherever they are found, are surely ill symptoms, and strong indications of a polluted and distempered mind; in which not religion and the love of God, not the improvement of our nobler faculties and securing our supreme

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felicity, but the love of the world, and a desire of carnal gratifications, are the *predominant* and *governing* principles.

BUT it is yet more strange, that mankind should suffer themselves to be deluded, and infatuated, to such an excessive degree, when the general question to be decided is plain to the *meanest* rational capacity. In the course of *temporal* affairs, and the pursuit of a *worldly* interest, intricacies and confusions will frequently happen. The most judicious will be at a loss how to *resolve*, and, when they have resolved, in what manner to *execute*. Even the very *fundamental principles* of worldly wisdom are imperfect.—— But nothing can be more obvious, where there is the *lowest* measure of reason, than the grand point which we are now considering, *viz.* that religion must be *one* simple, uniform, character—— Nothing can be more obvious, than that the *harmony* and *beauty* of a moral character can by no means be preserved, if *virtue* and *vice* are promiscuously blended in it, which are directly and essentially *repugnant* to each other—— Nothing is more obvious, than the

the *general* distinctions of virtue and vice; which are clearly discerned, as soon as they are proposed and represented to the mind —— And, finally, nothing is more obvious, than that it is not the performing *outward* acts of virtue, but the disposition and bent of the *mind* to virtue, that denominates a virtuous man; that not assiduity, and seeming fervent zeal, in external offices of devotion, but the inward *habit* and *temper* of piety, constitutes a truly religious man: And when either riches or honours are the *principal* object of our affection and regard, for the sake of which higher and nobler pursuits are neglected and sacrificed; we may justly be said (tho' we are possessed of *some* virtues, and abstain from more *gross* and *infamous* irregularities) to have that *carnal mind which is enmity against God*, because *it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.* It is absolutely impossible, that two *opposite* interests should be heartily espoused, and *ultimately* pursued at one and the same time; and this is the foundation of what our Saviour has asserted in the text, that *No man can*

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serve two masters——Ye cannot serve God, and Mammon.

IF we are subject to *two* persons, one of whom has an *absolute* and *supreme* authority, and the other only a *dependent* and *limited* authority; and if we actually serve the one only *so far*, as his orders do not *interfere* with the will and command of the *superior* power, but, in all cases of *competition*, acknowledge the latter *alone* to have the right of jurisdiction over us; this is not, in the sense of our Lord's observation, *serving two masters*: Nor can it, indeed, be considered in that light in the reason and nature of the thing itself, because we plainly own but *one*, to whom our obedience is *supremely* and *ultimately* due. If therefore our affections are placed on the present world, in a way that is perfectly *consistent* with the love, respect, and submission, which we owe to God, and with the strict rules of virtue, we are not properly the servants of the *world*, or of *Mammon*, but of *God* only. If, on the other hand, our concern for worldly enjoyments prevails over our regard to religion, and makes us *neglect*,

or

or directly *violate*, the unchangeable duty which we owe to our maker, we cannot be esteemed the servants of *God*, but of *Mammon* only. And between these two suppositions there is no *medium*. There is no such thing *possible*, as being half *worldly*, and half *religious*; but either to *God*, or *Mammon*, we must, of necessity, be supremely and chiefly *devoted*. The services are in themselves of an inconsistent nature, and require quite contrary dispositions; those, which religion demands from us, being far too *sublime* and *elevated* for the worldly mind, which is enslaved to mean and gross conceptions. ——And where this is the case, the only true God is, in effect, degraded into a *secondary* and *subservient* Deity; and that dominion, which is his unalienable right, is *sacrilegiously* transferred to sense and appetite. But it will be of great use to us to examine the subject more at large; and, therefore,

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IN the FIRST place, I shall suggest a few reflections, in order to explain farther our Saviour's general observation, that *No man can serve two masters*: And then,

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SECONDLY, Consider the case, which he has brought both as an example, and an illustration, of the general rule; *Ye cannot serve God, and Mammon.*

FIRST, I am to suggest a few hints, in order to explain, more clearly, the general observation of our blessed Saviour in the text, that *No man can serve two masters.* This proposition, tho' universally true, is here confined to religion and moral conduct; and the sense of it, upon the whole, amounts to nothing more than this——that virtue and vice, religion and sensuality, reverence and due obedience to God, and the gratification of corrupt passions, are things utterly incompatible, and that cannot subsist *together.*

THE service due to God must, in the nature of things, be supreme and absolute, or there can be *no* service at all due to him. For *who* is it, that we pretend to serve?——Is it not the *supreme* being? —— Is it not the *first*, the *wisest*, the *best* of beings? —— Is it not *one* infinitely exalted above *all other* beings? —— Is it not *he* from whom all excellence, all power, all authority are derived? —— And what

what but the *first*, the most *exalted*, and *supreme* honours can, with the least colour of reason and propriety, be offered to the first, the most exalted, and supreme power in the universe? The service which we owe to him cannot be limited by any other *authority*; which must, of necessity, proceed originally from him. It cannot be limited by any principles of *reason*; because all his laws, being dictated by infinite wisdom and immutable moral rectitude, must in every instance be gracious and equitable. And to say, that the service, which we are bound humbly to render to the Deity, cannot be *limited*, is exactly the same, and conveys an idea neither greater nor less, than the saying it is *unreserved* and *absolute*. And if an inferior and subordinate respect of the infinite creator be really not respect, but *indignity*, *contempt*, and *insult*; if it in effect denies his supremacy, which is essential to the very idea of God; it then unavoidably follows, either that he has *no* right at all to our service, or that he must be the *ultimate* object of it. And if he is indeed, of right, the supreme object of

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our reverence and homage; *all* criminal passions must be mortified, *all* vicious indulgencies restrained, and *every* interest, that is opposite to his universal moral government, sincerely and entirely renounced.

BUT we may proceed one step farther, and represent the point in a light somewhat different; and that is, that every *reason* which can be supposed, or justly alleged, for virtue, and obedience to God, in *any* instance, must hold *equally* strong for virtue, and obedience, in *all* instances. If the *amiableness* of virtue be pleaded; it is, in *all* the branches of it, lovely and beautiful. If it is recommended as the *dignity* and *perfection* of Human nature; there can *no* instance of it be named, to which these properties do not essentially belong —— If as the most natural substantial and exalted *happiness* of man, and of all other intelligent beings; this character, likewise, may justly be ascribed, and upon the same general foundation of truth and reason, to the moral duties of *piety* towards God, the moral duties of *justice* and *benevolence* to our fellow-creatures,

tures, and to all the ſtrictly moral offices of *ſelf-government* —— ſobriety, temperance, and chaſtity. In like manner, if the reaſon aſſigned for a particular act of obedience to God be this, that he is our Creator, this reaſon muſt hold *univerſally*; or if it be this, that he is our continual preſerver, our ſupreme benefactor, and righteous governour, this alſo muſt extend, equally, to *every* inſtance of obedience: For if when the reaſon is the *ſame*, it does not oblige in *all* caſes, it can juſtly oblige in *no* caſe at all; if it be not, in itſelf, *always* a ſufficient motive, it can *never* be a ſufficient motive. —— So far then, if the reaſoning has any ſolidity or force in it, it holds entirely for *virtue*, and abſolutely againſt *vice*; or, in other words, againſt all *kinds* and *degrees* of vice, and for *every* branch and degree of virtue.

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AND, on the contrary, if there are any good reaſons to juſtify diſobedience to God, and vicious gratification, in *one* inſtance, *theſe* muſt alſo *juſtify* diſobedience, and criminal gratification, in *all* inſtances. If, for example, violent and inflamed

paſſions

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passions are allowed to *plead* for it, the plea must be of equal weight in every case without *exception*, where there are the *like* inflamed and violent passions. If *merely* the false pleasures of sin, or the temporary advantages of sin, are a *reasonable* motive to the practice of it, the *just efficacy* of this motive cannot be confined to *single* instances, but must be admitted *universally*. And if it be fit at any *time*, or in any *circumstance*, that God should be disobeyed, he can have no claim to our obedience in the *least* point, upon fixed and *invariable* rules of reason. —— As therefore it appears, that if right reason is *at all* on the side of virtue, it must hold universally for virtue; or if it be *at all* on the side of vice, it must hold universally for vice; from hence it necessarily follows, that there neither are, nor *can be*, any principles in nature, on which religion and disobedience to God, moral goodness and irregular sensual excesses, can form a *consistent*, a *justifiable*, or even an *excusable* character. And this may suffice for explaining the general proposition contained

tained in the text, that *No man can serve two masters.* SERM. XII.

I NOW proceed briefly to consider the particular case, which our Saviour has proposed as an example, and an illustration, of this general rule; which is thus expressed, *Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.* —— To serve *Mammon* represented here, in the strong and beautiful manner of the ancients, as a *person*, a *master*, or *idol-deity*; to serve *Mammon*, I say, when it is stripped of *figure*, and reduced to its plain sense, denotes the *immoderate* desire and pursuit of riches; the being captivated and enslaved by what St. *John* stiles *the lust of the eye*, so as to have *a heart exercised in covetous practices*; the having a mind so *devoted* to these worldly concerns, as to regard no *moral* obligations, no rules of *honour* or *justice*, when they stand in the way of our base and avaricious purposes; the suffering the love of the world to over-rule the principles of *generosity* and *mercy*; or, finally, the being wholly *immersed* in these low and unprofitable pursuits, and in them to *center* our affections, our desires, our supreme

and

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and ultimate happiness. And that this carnality and worldly-mindedness is utterly inconsistent with all true religion, will undeniably appear upon a little sober reflection. In general, the love of the world is founded on considerations entirely *sensitive*; the love of God on an inward lively conviction of his amiable *moral* perfections; of which, where there is a just impression, there will be an ardent desire to conform to his example as our chief honour and felicity, and, of consequence, a comparative disesteem, nay a generous and noble disdain, of every *inferior* good. The low *taste*, and base groveling *habits*, which are always contracted by a too intense application, by an entire devotedness of mind, to worldly objects, must indispose every man, who is thus unhappily sunk beneath the dignity of his nature, both for discharging the *rational duties*, and relishing the *pure* and *refined pleasures*, of religion.

BUT notwithstanding this many, who are fond of their *idol*, cannot be perswaded to discard *Mammon*, nor bear the thought of bidding open and insolent defiance

fiance to *God*; and, in this miſerable perplexity, they have no other ſhift to have recourſe to, but to *compound* matters between God and Mammon. With this view they *flatter* and *compliment*, and ſometimes make *preſents* to the Deity, to ſooth and mollify him, and prevail with him to *indulge* them in their favourite vices. Vain effort of human folly!——to attempt to engage the wiſeſt of beings to be as it were a party againſt his own *laws* and *government*; to conſent that the *natural order* of things ſhould be perverted, and the *foundations* of *virtue* undermined. No ſcheme of this kind has hitherto been invented, but what is palpably abſurd, and will not, cannot, ſtand the teſt of a ſerious and ſober examination.——If a man, who has gained great wealth by *fraudulent* and *unrighteous* practices, devotes part of the *ſpoil* to *charitable* uſes, or, as in *Popiſh* countries, to enrich and aggrandize the *clergy*, or adorn *churches*——What has this to do with *religion*? Can God be honoured by *ſharing* in the fruits of *oppreſſion* and *rapine*? Will he *accept* of any offerings, that are not recom-

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commended by *true repentance?* And can there be true repentance, unless the *temper* of the mind be *reformed?* Or can there be a reformation of the inward temper in such cases as these, unless a man finds himself prompted to *repair* the injury he has committed, by making a suitable restitution? Such an *extorted* devotion as this has not the *resemblance*, nothing of the *air*, of true piety; but the offender only parts with *some* of the wages of his unrighteousness (like a person in a *storm*) to save the *rest*; and that he may possess it more securely without an *anxious* sense of guilt, or *fear* of future punishment.——Again, if another man refuses to apply a *proportionable* part of his wealth to the relief of the *necessitous*; if either puffed up with *pride* above the due consideration of the *friendly* regards which he owes to Human nature, or *stupified* by indolence, or *rioting* in wanton excesses, he can behold men, like himself, oppressed, anxious, dispirited, pining away through want, and struggling hard, under the contempt and calamities of poverty, *barely* to *support*, for a little longer

longer ſpace, a wretched and comfortleſs existence here: If I ſay he can look on ſuch mortifying and affecting ſpectacles, without any *relentings* of heart, any ſoft emotions of *pity* and *ſympathy* —— to what purpoſe are all the *external* tokens of his *piety?* They are doubtleſs inſignificant grimace, ridiculous oſtentation, the utmoſt *intemperance* and *madneſs* of hypocriſy; attended with none of the profits of it *here*, becauſe it is too groſs to *deceive*, but, moſt ſurely, with the ſevereſt puniſhments that can be thought to be reſerved for it hereafter. For *he that loveth God* muſt *love his brother alſo:* And *whoſoever hath this worlds goods, and ſeeth his brother have need, and ſhutteth up his bowels of compaſſion from him*, how is it poſſible that the *love of God* ſhould *dwell in him?*——The love of God, whoſe *authority* he defies, whoſe *creatures* he inſenſibly neglects, whoſe *example* he oppoſes, whoſe *goodneſs* he is determined not to imitate, and muſt therefore deſpiſe. In theſe, and all other parallel inſtances, where men are *only* pious, or, at leaſt, more *affectedly* pious, becauſe they know that

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1 John iv. 21.

Chap. iii. 17.

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SERMON

SERMON XIII.

A general Discourse on the Nature and Use of Prayer.

MATTH. vi. 6.

But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret; and thy Father, who seeth in secret, shall reward the openly.

IN this chapter, we have a continuation of our Lord's divine sermon on the mount, in which he explains the moral law in its utmost extent and perfection; separating it from, SERM. XIII.

SERM. XIII. and condemning, the traditions of the *Jews*, by which they had made it void, placing our duty in its true light, and directing us to the *best*, the most *rational* and *acceptable*, manner of performing it, in opposition to the corrupt doctrines and practices of the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*.

AT the fifth verse, having before exposed the pride and hypocrisy of their *alms-givings*, he condemns their vain and ostentatious *prayers*, their discharging the offices of *private* devotion in places of chief resort, and in the public view of the world; and cautions every one of his disciples against imitating such examples, that had so much the air of *arrogance* and *affectation*: But *when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites* are: *For they love to pray, i. e.* to perform their *private* prayers, *standing in the synagogues* [the places appointed for *public* and *social* worship] *and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.*——They procure the *applauses* of the multitude, and the *reputation* of being persons of extraordinary *sanctity*, which is *all* the reward

reward they *aimed* at, or shall ever *obtain*. But, as it follows in text, do *thou* [as one that dost not *court* the regard and empty praises of thy fellow-creatures, but art *only solicitous* about the approbation and favour of almighty God] do *thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet*, and when *thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret; and thy Father, who seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.* —— It is most evident that our blessed Saviour takes it *here* for granted, "that *prayer* * is a duty incumbent on "mankind, and *naturally* results from their "*derived, limited*, and *dependent* state."

AND indeed almost *all* in *every* age, who have acknowledged a Deity and a Providence, have concurred in the *practice* of it, or at least in *allowing* it, whatever their own practice might be, to be an *important* part of religion. They have thought it *fit*, not only by proper *sentiments* and *affections* of the mind, but by

* *N. B.* I consider prayer, in this discourse, not altogether (though *chiefly*) in the stricter *confined* sense of the word; but in its common and most *extensive* acceptation.

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outward acts of worship, to *acknowledge* the absolute perfection of the supreme eternal first cause, and *praise* him for his excellencies; humbly to *own* their absolute *dependence* upon him as their creator, and the sovereign disposer of all events; to *confess* their unworthiness and ill deserts; to *implore* his protection and favour; and *render thanks* to him, as the great original and author of all their comfort and happiness, for the various benefits which they daily receive from him —— And it may justly be asked, in what way we can *best* account for this *general sense* of mankind? Shall we suppose, that it took its rise from *superstition*, and *perverted* notions of Deity? Or that it was a custom introduced, by the art and subtilty of designing men, in order to make a base and unwarrantable advantage of the *devotion* and *enthusiasm* of the multitude? This must seem a *strange*, and, I believe, very *unsatisfactory* solution of the difficulty, if we consider, how next to *universally* it has prevailed in *all* times, even the most *enlightened*, and amongst persons of the greatest variety of *temper* and

and *interest*; and that it has been acknowledged as a duty by the generality of the *wisest* and most *inquisitive*, as well as by the *unthinking* and *credulous*: All which circumstances afford a fair and most plausible ground of presumption, "that *reason*, and not *superstition*, is the foundation of it." But as prayer, notwithstanding this, has been represented as *absurd*, *useless*, and *dishonourable* to God; and because the *general practice* cannot be admitted as a *direct* and *full* proof, that it is *really* founded on the *reason* and *nature* of things; I shall enquire into the *grounds* of it more particularly: And endeavour to vindicate the *fitness* of it by shewing, "that there lies no solid *objection* against it, from *any thing* that we "*know* of the *fixed* rules and schemes of "providence; and that it is entirely *suitable* to the *nature* and *condition* of "man, and the *relation* he stands in to "God."

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THE duty of *prayer* necessarily supposes the *being* and *providence* of God, and, in my opinion likewise, that he exercises what we call a *particular providence*:

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dence: i. e. That tho' there is an *established constitution* and *order* of things, and the good and evil events, which happen in the world, are generally nothing else but the *course of nature*, or *natural causes* producing their *natural effects*; yet the God of *nature* can, by over-ruling and directing its *influences*, answer all the ends of a *particular* government, and make *natural causes* at all times, by the unerring skill and uncontroulable operation of his infinite wisdom and power, the *instruments* either of his *mercy*, or strict and exemplary *justice*, of the *preservation* and *happiness*, or the *destruction* and *misery* of mankind.

THUS, for example, *fire* and *water*, *wind* and *rain*, have *natural* powers and virtues, and are the effects of *natural* causes; but *when*, or *where*, the wind shall *blow* or rain *fall*, at what *time*, or in what *proportions*, these natural powers shall *give* or *with-hold* their influence, this the Almighty reserves as his unalienable prerogative: And this is his *rule* and *government* of *nature*, to serve the great purposes of providence with respect to the

moral

moral world. We may therefore, without the least taint of *enthusiasm*, " *pray* for " *fruitful seasons*, for *health* and *plenty*, " for the *success* of public councils and " negociations, and in short for *personal*, " *family*, or *national* blessings, and *depre-* " *cate* the contrary *evils* :" Since the supreme God without *departing* from the rules of his *general* providence, and *only* by *directing* the events of *nature*, can crown our land with *fertility*, or *blast* with unwholesome winds, in order to destroy by *famine* ; he can *purge* the air, or fill it with *pestilential* vapours ; occasion *unanimity*, or *distraction*, in public debates ; inspire *wisdom* and *courage*, or *dispirit* and *infatuate* ; and, in a word, be the author of *all* the good or evil, either to *individuals*, *families*, or *public communities*, which is necessary to support, and maintain with wisdom and equity, his empire over the world. And thus it appears upon the whole, that to address the infinite and universal sovereign Lord for *any kind* of *natural good*, or deprecate *any natural evil*, cannot be *absurd*, if we suppose that he exercises a particular pro-

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vidence: And as we have reason to believe, that this may be done, in most cases, without breaking in upon the standing laws of nature, or altering *visibly* the settled frame and order of the universe, there must be the utmost probability that it is the *true* situation and state of things; since it gives us a more *venerable* and *magnificent* idea of God's *providence*, and renders its influence both more *efficacious* and *extensive*.* Whereas, if every thing happens in a *fixed invariable* course, without being *directed* by infinite wisdom to serve any *particular* designs (which is what those, who object against the *reasonableness* of prayer, *falsely* imagine; and it seems, indeed, to be the grand *foundation* and *strength* of their prejudice:) If this, I say, be the case, then is the idea of a providence *debased*, and its omnipotent power is *degraded* and *limited*; and it would be no wonder if, upon *admitting* a principle so *injurious* to the *honour* of the Deity, the *fitness* of *prayer*, or of any *other* the most evident duty of piety, should be hard to be determined. BUT

* See this subject, of a particular Providence, more largely and distinctly treated of, *Vol.* 3. *Serm.* XIII. XIV.

BUT let it be obſerved farther, that prayer not only ſuppoſes that God exerciſes a *natural* providence, but that he is, likewiſe, the *governour* of the *moral* world; and conſequently that virtue, or a conformity to his perfections and laws, is a *neceſſary* qualification for his *favour*, and will one time or other be *rewarded*; but, on the contrary, that vice is the *proper* object of his *reſentment*, and muſt expoſe the guilty offender to *diſgrace* and *puniſhment*: And that as this Great Being is inclined, by the abſolute goodneſs of his nature, to deſire the *happineſs* of *all* his reaſonable creatures, he will be ready, at all times, to afford them every ſuch degree of *aſſiſtance* as is *neceſſary*, and conſiſtent with their *free agency*, in the purſuit of true wiſdom and virtue. And ſince *theſe principles*, on which prayer is entirely founded, are the moſt *worthy* and *honourable* ſentiments we can frame of God, it neceſſarily follows, "that it can no "more be *abſurd* (conſidered *in itſelf*) "to implore *his gracious aid* to enable "us to ſurmount the difficulties of a vir-"tuous courſe, and to be ſteady and per-

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"severing in it, and his *special protection* "and *favour* in consequence of our sin-"cere endeavours to please him;" than it is pray for the *natural* good things of the present life, and deprecate the *incident* calamities of it; which has already been shewn to be highly *reasonable*, and beyond the reach of a *just* exception.——These things being premised, by which the *force* of the main objections against the duty of prayer is, I apprehend, entirely destroyed, I shall now enquire into the *particular reasons* of it. From whence it will appear, that the *prejudices* which men may have entertained against it, when they are not to be ascribed to a corrupted mind and an impious alienation of the heart from God, arise from a *mistaken apprehension* of its *true* nature and design.

IT is certain then, in the FIRST place, that prayer cannot be *rightly* intended for the *information* of the Deity; either to acquaint him with the sincerity of the worshipper, with the inward principles and dispositions of his mind, or with the number and greatness of his wants: Because all *these* suppositions are, in the utmost degree,

degree, *dishonourable* to the eternal God, who, having an infinite all-comprehending intellect, must be thoroughly acquainted with *every* want of his creatures, and with the *minutest* circumstance in their condition, and know with an infallible exactness their most *hidden* motions and designs; as well as how to act, in all *possible* cases, with the most precise justice and regularity. And hence our blessed Saviour, in a passage immediately following the text, has cautioned us against protracting our prayers to an *unnecessary length*, by *tedious* and *indecent* repetitions; as if our maker was either at a great *distance* from us, or could not easily *understand* our case, or was determined not to hear us, unless we grew *rude* and *clamorous*: *But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions as the Heathen do: For they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: For your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask him.*

AGAIN, SECONDLY, as the *true end* of prayer cannot be to inform and instruct the Deity, so neither is it, in a strict and proper

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proper sense, to *move* his *compassion*: Because his kindness and mercy towards his creatures are, ever, *strong* and *unchangeable*; and it ought not to be imagined, since he knows every circumstance of their distress before-hand, that the most *lively* and *pathetic* representation of their wants can *influence* him to do *any thing*, to which he is not *inclined* and *prompted* by his *essential goodness*. "*Compassion*, as "it is a principle in *human* nature, has "*imperfection* and *weakness* attending it;" which must, by no means, be attributed to the infinite and all-perfect Being.

AND as our prayers cannot be imagined to excite any *new* sentiment of *goodness*, any *instinct* of *compassion* in God, it is also impossible, that they should induce him to *alter* any of his *general* purposes, or to *recede* from that *wise scheme*, which he originally fixed, for the government of the world. We therefore entertain very low and contemptible conceptions of him, if we understand *importunity* in prayer to be a *wearying him out* with our continued addresses, and a kind of *teazing* him into a compliance; or, indeed, if we imagine that

that it has any other *weight* with him, than as it renders us *fit subjects* of his mercy. SERM. XIII.

AND, finally, we are not to conceive of our maker, as if he was *backward* to do us good, and therefore wanted to be *courted* and *sollicited* to it; or as a *vain* being, that delights to be *complimented*, and to hear his own excellencies *proclaimed*; and takes pleasure in the submissions and humble acknowledgments of his creatures, merely as the *pomp* and *splendid ostentation* of his supreme power and dominion: Because these things are adapted only to please *weak* minds, having nothing in them of *true* and *solid* excellence, and, of consequence, can never be approved by the *infinite wisdom* of God.

AND now, from all these premisses, this is the natural and unavoidable *conclusion* ——" that the *ultimate end* of the duty " of *prayer* does not respect *God*, but " our *selves*;" as indeed the *end* of *all* religion is not any *advantage* that can redound to him, but the *rectitude* and *happiness* of mankind, in which his glorious perfections are most eminently displayed.

Let

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Let us therefore see, whether prayer will not answer some very valuable purposes, considered in this view. And if it can be proved, that it is *a natural means* of assisting and advancing our improvement and progress in virtue, in the noblest virtues, the most sublime and amiable dispositions; it can then be no longer disputed, that it is a service founded in *reason*, and *wisely* recommended and bound upon us by the *christian revelation*. And this I shall now endeavour briefly to demonstrate.

IT is unquestionably *fit*, not only that we form just and worthy notions of the divine perfections, but maintain such a *warm* and *lively sense* of *them* in our minds, as will engage us to behave towards the Deity, in all instances, with becoming veneration and respect. And this is not only our *duty*, but our *interest*; because it will naturally lead us to endeavour after the purification and refinement of our temper in *imitation* of his *moral excellencies*, and to keep ourselves within the *strictest bounds* of reason and virtue, from a regard to his *wisdom* and *authority*.

It

It must farther be allowed, that it is *fit* in us, and the highest point of *wisdom* we can attain to, to maintain *a strong sense* of God as our Creator and supreme Governour, and of our obligations to act suitably to those relations in which he has placed us; and to secure his *esteem* and *approbation*, on whom we absolutely depend, by a life of entire resignation and obedience to his will. It is likewise our indispensable *duty* to preserve a *thankful* and *affectionate* idea of the divine goodness: For the *goodness* of God is one of the most noble and generous incentives to virtue; and while there is a grateful remembrance of it in the mind, it will beget an habitual supreme love of the Deity, universal obedience to his commands, and, particularly, an imitation of this amiable perfection, by acts of beneficence and mercy to our fellow-creatures.

Now prayer is *a natural means* to *raise* and *confirm* all these excellent sentiments and dispositions within us, which are such forcible engagements to a religious and holy life.——For what can be better *adapted* to inspire the most solemn reverence

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rence and veneration of God, than a *serious stated adoration* of his infinite excellencies? What can *tend* more *immediately* to fix in our minds a deep sense of our necessary dependence upon him, than *a frequent acknowledgment* of him as our almighty *creator*, and the *sovereign administrator* of all the affairs of the universe; than *confessing* our *impotence* and *insufficiency* for our own happiness; and conscientiously *imploring* his *direction*, and *gracious concurrence* with us, in every scene of life? What can afford a stronger conviction of the excellence, importance, and absolute necessity of virtue, than the *accustoming* ourselves to *pray*, that we may be *led* and *preserved* in the paths of true righteousness and goodness, as the *perfection* of our nature, and the highest *concern* and *interest* of our being? What can more effectually *charm* us to the *love* of virtue, than *a frequent exalting* the matchless beauties of God's moral character?

To which we may add, that serious and frequent addresses to the Deity, as they require an *elevation* of *thought*, and a great degree of *abstractedness* from *sense*, naturally

naturally beget a *grandeur* and *dignity* of mind, superior to the *little* accidents and vicissitudes to which worldly affairs are subject, a noble *contempt* of unlawful advantages and irregular pleasures, an increasing *purity* of thought and affection; and transform the pious worshipper into a *divine* temper and life. They inspire an habitual *hope* and *confidence* in the mercy of God as our *Father*, who compassionates our infirmities, and will reward our integrity; and thereby *strengthen* and *invigorate* every good resolution, and help to carry it on to *perfection*. They give a fixed and rooted sense of his *omnipresence*, and of his clear and intimate *inspection* of us; which tends to make us always *circumspect*, and *regular* in our conduct. An *humble confession* of our sins, made with becoming ingenuity and remorse, naturally produces an *abhorrence* of all past errors, together with strong *purposes* to *amend* and *avoid* all vicious courses for the future. And a deliberate and thankful acknowledgment of the divine goodness has a direct aptitude to raise in us *love*, *gratitude*, and *joy* in God, and a

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SERM. XIII. *chearfulness* and *sublime delight* in doing good. So that *prayer*, by its *visible tendency* to establish these holy dispositions in us, and make us more strictly and inflexibly virtuous, must be "*a natural* "*means* (which was the thing that I undertook to prove) to render us *fit* objects of our maker's favour." And surely there can need nothing farther to be said in vindication of it: For it must be an eminent instance both of the *wisdom* and *goodness* of God, to insist upon that "as the *condition* of our deriving *help* and "*favour* from him, which, in the nature of things, *prepares* us for the *reception* of it, and *disposes* us in the best "manner to *improve* it."

SHOULD it be said, that these great and useful purposes may be answered by serious *meditation alone*; and if so, to what end is *prayer* enjoined, or how can it be shewn to be a *rational* and *religious* obligation? ——I would answer to this, that the *prescribing* prayer as a *fixed* and *necessary* duty must *induce* all such, as pay a conscientious regard to the authority of the divine legislator, to *enter frequently upon*

these

these useful meditations: Whereas if they were left at large, and at their full liberty, they might be inclined to *omit* them, or engage in them but *seldom*, and consequently their *use* and *efficacy* might be greatly *abated*, if not quite *destroyed*, by their being generally *neglected*. If it be urged further (and I know of nothing else that can be objected) that an express command *to meditate* often, *as often*, as it is now supposed to be our duty to *pray*, and on the very same weighty and momentous *subjects*, must be *a sufficient means* in reason, and consequently in all wise government, to prevent *this ill effect*: I answer again —— that in an *immediate* and *solemn address* to our maker, our *attention* is likely to be more *close*, and our *sense* of things more *strong* and *lively* than in any *common meditation*; because we have, in a particular manner, the *awe* of an omniscient and almighty being, to restrain us from *carelessness* and *levity*. "If "our *discourse*, upon *all* occasions, would "be more *aptly* and *correctly* formed, if "it was *directly presented* to some *eminent* "*personage*, of whose wisdom and dig-

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"ration, than can *reasonably* be expected
"in *a free soliloquy*, where we converse
"only with *ourselves*; our *integrity*, and
"*concern* of mind, in the other *parallel*
"case (where the *heart itself* is more ac-
"curately and strictly *scanned*) must be
"*influenced in proportion*." No man who knows *himself*, and the common workings of *Human nature*, can possibly *doubt* of this: "Here is, therefore, a very great
"and beneficial *effect*, a *peculiar* strong
"*enforcement* of religion and virtue, re-
"sulting from *prayer*; that is not *so likely*
"to be produced by *meditation alone*."—And this, I think, is an unanswerable defence of its being made, by *revelation*, a *stated* and *universal* branch of instituted duty.

AND now as it appears from the account which has been given, of the true *nature* and *design* of prayer, that it is a *subordinate* and *instrumental* duty; *i. e.* a duty not enjoined *for its own sake*, but with a view to some *greater* and *nobler* end: We may from hence infer,

IN

IN the FIRST place, that our prayers ought at *all times* to be offered up, to the supremely gracious and omnipotent Father of mankind, with the utmost *seriousness* and *solemnity*. For it must be evident to the slightest reflection, that the more *intensely* engaged we are in our religious addresses to the Deity, we are so much the more *likely* to establish, in our minds, a becoming reverence of his incomprehensible and infinite glories, a lively conviction that his favour is our ultimate felicity, and sentiments of *horror* at the thought of his displeasure, and of whatever has a *necessary* tendency to expose us to it. It may be laid down as a *general maxim*, of undeniable truth and certainty, " that the *secondary* duties of " religion can *never*, from the *nature* of " things, answer their *end*, if they are " *slightly* and *carelessly* discharged :" For as they have a *reference* to somewhat *beyond* themselves, we must always have our minds closely attentive to that which is their chief and most momentous *view* ; and therefore not rest in the *outward means*, but use them in such a manner as

SERM. XIII. is most agreeable to the *reason* of their *institution*. From whence it follows, that a *dull*, *heavy*, *unanimated* prayer, run over with a *confused* and *inconsiderate* formality, is not properly speaking *prayer*; but *trifling*, and most audacious *impertinence*.

THERE can *no good* be expected, from a *light* and *vain* mind, in *any affair* of Human life; much less in the *important concern* of religion; and least of all, in an *immediate address* to the supreme being, which (if any thing in nature and reason can) must surely require all imaginable gravity and seriousness. And he who is *rash* and *indeliberate* in uttering his *petitions* to so *exalted*, and, to the contemners of his paternal grace and condescension, so *tremendous* a being on account of his power and strict justice; he who is not afraid to present, to absolute wisdom and immaculate purity, the sacrifice of *folly* and *insolence*; is in the direct way to have his mind rather *injured* and *corrupted*, than *improved* by his prayers: As such rudeness and disrespect argue his entertaining *a mean opinion* of the God whom he invocates, and must, in the end, destroy all

all the *seeds* of a *reverential* regard to him, all *concern* about *any* offices of *piety*. In vain therefore do we pretend to *worship* him, if we *honour* him only *with* our *lips*, whilst our *heart is far from* him.—— *Hypocrisy*, in every instance that can be conceived, is a most offensive and hateful vice, and the infallible mark of a *base* and *degenerate* mind. But to play *the hypocrite* with that infinite and omniscient Spirit, who presides solely and uncontroulably over universal nature, is accompanied with signal aggravations of *guilt*: For it is the grossest indignity that can be offered to *all* his *perfections*, a defiance of his *authority*, and an *equal* contempt both of his *mercy* and *displeasure*.

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Matth. xv. 8.

AGAIN; from the *nature* and *design* of *prayer* we farther learn, that it should be *frequent*. For we must all know, "that "an *habitual veneration* of God, and "*sense* of the obligations which we are "under to him, can never be attained, "but in the *way* that *all other habits* are "produced, *viz.* by *stated* and *customary* "*acts* of devotion and piety." And upon this plain foundation in the *reason* and

SERM. XIII. *truth* of things it was, that St. *Paul* exhorted the *Thessalonians* to *pray without ceasing*, *i. e.* not only to endeavour to acquire such a *serious* and *well-disposed temper*, as will be an *habitual preparation* for prayer, but *actually* to *discharge* the duty itself, at all the *proper seasons* and *occasions* for it; *so often*, at least, as the *nature* of the institution requires to render it *advantageous* to us, and *subservient* to our perfection and happiness, as well as in particular *exigencies*, that may more *especially* demand it. And tho' I will not pretend to *fix* for *every* man, what the *precise* times and seasons of prayer are, because this depends on a variety of *circumstances*, which cannot *all* be reduced under *one general rule*; yet this I may take upon me to assert, without danger of transgressing the bounds of truth or modesty —— that if the bulk of mankind, and even of persons *professing godliness*, were more *regular* and *constant* in their devotions, they would be, in many respects, *wiser* and *better* than they are; not only more *submissive* and *reverent*, in the temper of their minds, towards *God*, but more *humble* and *peace-*

1 Thess. v. 17.

able,

able, more *just* and *charitable*, more *mortified* with respect to worldly vanities, more *correct* in their desires, and more *calm* and *decent* in all their passions. For it is the case of all the *subordinate* duties of religion, that if they are performed but *seldom*, as well as in a negligent and superficial manner, " they in a great mea-" sure lose their *use*; and, consequently, " as they have no *goodness* or *excellency* " in them, but as they stand *connected* " with their *end*, they must also lose " their *acceptableness* and *efficacy* with " God."

BUT then in the THIRD place (and this indeed is clearly *implied* in what has been already offered, and *deduced* from the same general principles) we ought never to suffer our *prayers* to interfere with other *indispensable duties* of religion, or with the *necessary business* and *offices* of Human life. For there is a *natural* and *adapted* season for *every* duty; and the use of prayer, in particular is, to implant, to raise, and cherish *a moral temper*, and not to impair or undermine it. So that if any give themselves up so entirely to retire-

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tirement from the world, and to *passionate flights* and *extasies* of devotion, as to neglect *equity* and *mercy*, and other *weightier matters of the law*; if they *desert* their *post* even in order to pray, when they are called upon to discharge the *incumbent offices* of their *social* state, when either the public, or private persons, *require* and stand *in need* of their *assistance*; their prayers, instead of being *helps*, are really *hinderances* to true goodness: "In all "which cases, prayer cannot be deemed "a *reasonable service*; but is mere *extra-* "*vagance*, if not direct *immorality*."

UPON the same fixed and unalterable foundation in the reason of things, *viz.* because prayer is only a *secondary* and *subservient* duty, calculated and wisely adapted for promoting the *moral rectitude* of Human nature; as ever we desire or hope, that our supplications shall find access to the eternal majestic throne of him that ruleth over all, and be received with paternal indulgence and condescension, we must instantly *relinquish all* our vices, and *purge* our minds from sinful and irregular passions. If we *regard iniquity* in our *hearts*,

hearts, and, as the unavoidable consequence, practise it in our lives, God will shew no favour to our *warmest*, *longest*, or most *importunate* petitions. For the *warmth*, in such cases as these, must be either raised on a *false* foundation, or be a mere *mechanic* piety, *unaccountable* as to its *origin*, and *uncertain* as to its *continuance*: It contradicts the *habitual* temper; and therefore, at best, can only be esteemed as an *accidental* swerving of nature from its *allowed* and more *usual* excesses. And as for the *length* and *importunity* of such prayers, they are rather a demonstration of the *bold* and *daring* temper, than of the *sincerity* and *humble devotion* of the petitioner; because a disobedient and stubborn child, or an habitual rebel against the incontestable dominion of his rightful prince, ought in his supplications to be *modest*, *concise*, and *diffident*, instead of affecting tedious *prolixities*, or urging his demands with an indecent *vehemence* and *assurance* of success. And if we think to atone, by the *frequency* and *enthusiastic agonies* of our devotion, for the disorders and immoralities of

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SERM. XIII. of our conduct, our prayers must be ranked amongst the last and most heinous *impieties* of *superstition*, and *false religion*: They are *absurd*, *inconsistent*, *unnatural*, *despicable*, even in the estimate of Human reason.

WHO, for example, does not clearly see that it is most idle and excessive *presumption*, for any man to expect the forgiveness of his own numerous offences committed against *God*, whilst he is implacable in his resentments towards his *brethren*, and his heart is cankered with *malice* and *revenge*? The *reason* is exactly the *same*, and applicable in an *equal* latitude, to *all other* criminal habits *deliberately* cherished, to *all* immoral courses *voluntarily* pursued.——So that if we would entertain the most distant glimmerings of a probable hope, that our *prayers*, which without reformation are *disguised* impieties, will be of any greater advantage to us than our more *notorious* and *formal* impieties; we must each of us with *a resolution* maturely weighed, and that will approve itself to be fixed and upright whenever it is brought to the

trial

trial, be able to say in the words of the *Psalmist* (in the *stile* adapted to the *Jewish* dispensation, but in the *general sense* consonant to all times) *I will wash mine hands in innocency: So will I compass thine altar, O LORD.* SERM. XIII. Psal. xxvi. 6.

ALL these rules are of indispensable weight, and must be strictly observed by us. And if with the *zeal*, the *wise views*, and *holy dispositions* of mind which I have now recommended, we *pray alway in the name* of Christ, —— *and watch thereunto with all perseverance*; we need not doubt of receiving, from the *free* and *inexhaustible* source of mercy, every *necessary* and *expedient* good.

SERMON

SERMON XIV.

The Reaſonableneſs of that Branch of Prayer; which is ſtiled Interceſſion.

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1 TIM. ii. 1.

I exhort therefore that, firſt of all, ſupplications, prayers, interceſſions, and giving of thanks be made for all men.

IN my laſt diſcourſe, I conſidered the reaſonableneſs of prayer in general: In which it was ſhewn, that it is *wiſely* enjoined upon us, as a neceſſary and indiſpenſable duty, by the Chriſtian revelation; and very conſiſtently with God's being willing to beſtow all good

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good things upon mankind in that way which is the most *fit*, and most conducive to the happiness of his creatures.— I intend, at this time, to discourse concerning that part of prayer which is called *intercession*, or the petitions which we offer up to almighty God in behalf of *others*. This, we learn from the text and several other passages of the New Testament, is a duty that our holy religion expresly requires of us; upon which account it is proper, that we should, in some measure at least, understand the *true grounds* and *reasons* of it.

AND this indeed is the more necessary, because it is pretended by some, that it cannot be accounted for upon the *reasons* which have been alledged for prayer in *general*; since every man *sufficiently acknowledges* the sovereign dominion of the Deity, and his absolute dependence upon him, and may *impress* a *strong sense* of these things upon his mind, by begging the supplies of *his own* wants, without concerning himself with the *case* of his *fellow-creatures*. And, moreover, tho' it should be allowed, that the great God, in order

order to our obtaining mercy for *ourselves*, may require that we should *pray* for it, because our prayers have a *natural tendency* to produce such a *temper* and *frame* of mind, as will dispose us in the best manner to *improve* it; yet it cannot be imagined, that our supreme governour, who is absolutely just and good, has render'd his favour to his creatures so vastly *uncertain* and *precarious*, as to depend in any degree upon the *intercession* of others; and, consequently, on their *weaknesses*, *variable resolutions*, and *partial prejudices*; but, on the contrary, is always inclined to do what is *right* and *fit*, and confer upon them all *necessary* good; and cannot be moved, by our most earnest supplications, to grant any thing *farther*, any thing which they do not themselves *desire*, and are not properly *qualified* to receive.

To remove this objection, against the duty which we are exhorted to in the text, I shall do these two things; which will give me an opportunity of suggesting such hints, as, I hope, will make the

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weakness of every part of it clearly appear.

FIRST, I shall consider whether there be not *in general* a good *reason* to be assigned for it; whether the practice of it will not answer some very *valuable end*; and, of consequence, whether the author of our holy religion has not acted *wisely*, in making it a part of our *duty*. I shall then enquire, in the

SECOND place, *how far* it may be reasonable for us to expect, that God will be favourable to our fellow-creatures upon *our prayers* and *intercessions* in their behalf; and this will teach us, *how* we must *understand* such petitions, and *what* are the proper *restrictions* and *limitations*, with which they are to be made.

FIRST, I am to consider whether there be not a good *reason* to be assigned for this branch of prayer; whether the practice of it will not answer some very *valuable end*; and, of consequence, whether the author of our holy religion has not acted *wisely*, in making it a part of our *duty*. And in general it may be observed (though the contrary is insinuated

ated by the objection) that praying for *others* does really anſwer much the *ſame* good purpoſes as praying for *ourſelves*, and that the *expediency* and *uſefulneſs* of it may in part be accounted for upon the very ſame principles. Nay, it may be queſtioned, whether it has not a tendency to *inſpire* and *impreſs* ſome uſeful ſentiments relating to the Deity, which the other does not ſo *immediately* ſuggeſt. In *both* we *equally* acknowledge the tranſcendent excellence, ſupreme majeſty, and eternal perfection of the great author and governour of the univerſe: For theſe things *all prayer* neceſſarily ſuppoſes. But if, in thoſe prayers which reſpect *ourſelves*, we endeavour to warm our minds with a becoming ſenſe of almighty God as *our* creator, preſerver, and munificent benefactor; in thoſe which reſpect *others* we conſider him as having created, and together with us ſupporting, animating, and extending his goodneſs, to the *whole race* of mankind. If in the *former*, we humbly own *our* entire and continual dependence upon him; in the *latter*, we acknowledge that *all our fellow-creatures*

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SERM. XIV. are equally dependent upon him for their being, and every circumstance of their happiness or misery. In short, if in the one, we celebrate his providential care of *us*, and direction of every event that relates to *our particular* interest; in the other, we more *directly* represent him to the view of our minds as governour of the *whole rational creation*, and sovereign disposer of all things; and consequently take *a larger survey* of the operations of his providence, and the influences of his wisdom, power, and goodness.

THIS argument might be farther insisted on, but that I think it more proper to shew, that there is *a particular* reason for this branch of prayer, which is very weighty and important; and that is, "its tendency to *strengthen* the principle of *universal benevolence* in us, to make us look upon the interests of our fellow-creatures as our own, to excite in us an *abhorrence* of their misery, and an *ardent generous concern* for their happiness." *Universal benevolence* so naturally results from those *kind* and *useful affections*, which the gracious author

author of our being hath planted in us; it is so suitable to our *reason*, to the *circumstances* and *necessities* of mankind, and the *relations* in which they mutually stand to each other; the convenience and pleasure of *private life*, and the welfare, nay the very being, of *civil societies* so necessarily depend upon the exercise of it; it is so essential to the *rectitude* and *happiness* of every intelligent mind, and has been so justly esteemed, by all who have thought *worthily* of God, to be his most adorable *perfection*, and the chief *dignity* and *beauty* of his nature; that whatever has a *tendency* to cultivate and improve it, as it must also in the same proportion *promote* the most *amiable* part of man's *moral* perfection, must be of the *greatest use*, and therefore *wisely* required, by the supreme lawgiver, as an *instrumental* duty of religion.

Now this is the case, in an eminent degree, with respect to the duty recommended in the text.——For what can be better fitted to produce an *habitual good-will* to mankind, than the accustoming ourselves to *pray* for their *prosperity*? If

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we *sincerely* and *affectionately* remember *them*, when we offer up our addresses to almighty God for *ourselves*——Can such a practice as this consist with *malice* and *ill-nature*, *envy* and *revenge*; or indeed with an indolent and stupid *indifference*, whether our fellow-creatures are happy or miserable? The *reasonableness* and *beauty* of benevolence in itself must recommend the exercise of it to all mankind, who have not most wofully depraved and corrupted their nature. But when we consider, besides this, that God has by an express and positive command obliged us to *pray* for them, "as a constant *testi-* "*mony* of our *kind* and *charitable* affec- "tions, and a *natural means* to preserve "our sense of *generosity* and *goodness* "warm and lively;" who that has any regard to the *authority* of his great maker, of his wise and gracious governour and benefactor, can discharge this duty with a view to his *approbation*, and not be led by it to *love* his *neighbour as himself*, and improve his charity, by degrees, to its *utmost perfection*?

LET

LET it be obſerved farther, that by offering up *prayers*, *interceſſions*, and *ſupplications* for ALL *men*, according to the Apoſtle's advice in the text, we are neceſſarily led to conſider God as the *univerſal parent* of mankind; who is ſincerely deſirous of their *happineſs*, and diſpoſed to confer upon them all *ſuitable* good. And what are the natural conſequences of ſuch a belief?——Why that all, who partake with us in the ſame *common nature*, are our *brethren*, and conſequently the proper objects of our *beneficence* and *compaſſion*; that as we are *all* the *offſpring* of him who is abſolutely good, we cannot act ſo becoming the dignity of our *original*, and the *relation* we have the honour to ſtand in to this moſt perfect being, as when we are employed in *doing good*; and that the *habit* of *univerſal benevolence*, as it is a reſemblance of his ſupreme perfection, conformity to his moſt amiable example and to the methods of his providence, muſt render us highly acceptable to him, and the objects of his *peculiar favour*. And can we grant theſe conſequences without

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being *desirous* of the happiness of *all mankind*, and strongly *inclined* to promote it; or without endeavouring to be *actually as useful* as our capacities and circumstances will allow, that we may bear strong marks of our maker's *image*, and secure his *approbation?* This is scarce possible where there is a serious and considerate mind.

I SHALL only add, that as the duty of praying for *mankind* in general is of great advantage, as it tends to raise and enlarge the principle of *universal benevolence*; there is one particular branch of it, *viz. praying* for our *enemies*, which is not only a *natural means* of moderating *unruly anger*, and rooting out all the seeds of *revenge* and *cruelty*, but if it be accompanied with that sincere love and desire of their welfare, which a *solemn address* to omniscient goodness in their favour necessarily supposes, is the most *highly refined* and *noble* disposition of Human nature: And since this duty has *a tendency* to produce so *generous* a spirit, which is the foundation of all *social* happiness, and gives a distinguished *grace* and *lustre* to all orders and stations of human life;

life; it cannot, I think, he doubted, but that it has, *equally* with prayer in general, a manifeſt ſtrong foundation in the reaſon of things, and is *properly* recommended and enjoined, as one of the neceſſary offices of *Chriſtian piety*, by the gracious inſtitution of the goſpel.——I proceed now to the

SECOND thing propoſed, which was to enquire, how far it may be *reaſonable* for us to expect, that God will extend his favour to *others* upon our *prayers* and *interceſſions* in their behalf; and, conſequently, *how* we muſt underſtand ſuch petitions, and what are the proper *reſtrictions* and *limitations*, with which they ought always to be made. The Apoſtle's exhortation is delivered in *general* terms; and therefore our own reaſon muſt determine, in what *caſes* it is expedient for us to pray for our fellow-creatures, and for what *particular bleſſings*. And if there be any thing, which we have good ground to believe will not be *granted*, as being beſide the *ordinary courſe* of providence, or *unfit* for God to beſtow as the *wiſe*

governour

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governour of the moral world, it must be impertinent and trifling to make it the matter of our petitions. This being premised, I shall pursue the enquiry more particularly,

FIRST, with respect to our prayers for the *happiness* of *all mankind*, or for the *peace* and *welfare* of the *civil community* to which we belong.

SECONDLY, with respect to those prayers for *families*, or *private persons*, in which we petition for any *natural good*, or to avert any *natural evil*.

THIRDLY, as to prayers for the advancement and encrease of *truth* and *virtue* in *general*: And those, in the

LAST place, in which we desire *assistance* for particular persons to recover them from *error* and *vice*, and promote their *moral perfection*.

FIRST, I am to enquire concerning the *reasonableness* of praying for the *happiness* of *mankind* in general, or the *peace* and *welfare* of the *civil community* to which we

we belong. If by the happineſs of mankind we underſtand *their happineſs upon the whole* —— to *pray* for it cannot appear *unreaſonable* to any one, who conſiders the *unlimited* and *univerſal* goodneſs of their great creator: And accordingly, the Apoſtle, in the fourth verſe of this chapter, urges it upon us from this very conſideration; that it is *good and acceptable in the ſight of God our Saviour, who will have all men to be ſaved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.* Or if by the happineſs of mankind we mean their *temporal proſperity*, that *liberty*, *peace*, *plenty*, and *good order* may prevail and flouriſh throughout the world, and particularly in the *civil ſociety* of which we are members; to pray for this cannot be *abſurd*, if we believe a particular providence, which, without a *miracle*, can direct and over-rule nature's influences in ſuch a manner, as to make them ſubſervient to all its great purpoſes either for the *good* or *hurt* of ſocieties.

IT muſt indeed be allowed, that the *final happineſs* of mankind depends upon their *moral rectitude*; and that thoſe *bleſ-*

ſings,

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sings, which may also be considered as *rewards* of providence, are only conferred on regular and virtuous societies, in which *frugality*, *justice*, *probity*, *honour*, *generosity*, and the *social virtues* prevail; and that disorderly communities which are enervated by *luxury*, and abandoned to *corruption* and *vice*, have reason to expect, from the *king of nations*, nothing but tokens of his displeasure and vengeance. Therefore as it cannot be presumed, that God will *ascertain* the happiness either of private persons or bodies politic, so as to render it an *unavoidable* and *necessary* event; as this, I say, cannot be presumed, because it depends upon their *virtue*, which is entirely a matter of *choice*, and will admit of no *constraint*; the *general sense* of the prayers which we are now speaking of can be *no more* than this——

"That the almighty will do all that is "*necessary*, *consistent* with his *unvariable* "*perfection* of nature and the *wisdom* o "his providence, to promote the *moral* "*rectitude*, and in consequence the *su*-"*preme felicity*, of *all* his reasonable "creatures; that he will be graciously

pleased

" pleaſed to favour all *good ſocieties* with
" his *ſpecial protection*, and crown them
" with *proſperity* and *honour*; and make
" uſe of all methods, that are *agreeable*
" to the *eſtabliſhed rules* of his govern-
" ment, for the *reformation* of ſuch as
" are vicious, that theſe likewiſe may en-
" joy the bleſſings of *order*, *peace*, and
" *liberty*, and become the objects of his
" kind and pleaſurable regard."

IF *this* be all, it may be ſaid, what do our *prayers* ſignify? Will not the friend, the father, of mankind do all this, whether we *petition* him or not? If we ſhould grant he would, ſtill our *prayers* for the good of mankind, and for national peace and tranquility, are of unqueſtionable *uſe*, as they have a *direct tendency* to *procure* the things prayed for, *viz.* perſonal and public *virtue*, and conſequently private and ſocial *happineſs*. For we are to conſider, that it is a duty not enjoined on *a few*, but obligatory upon *all*; and if *all* would diſcharge it, according to the deſign and direction of Chriſtianity, in a becoming ſenſe of what they *owe* to *God*, to their *reaſonable nature*, and to *civil ſociety*, it could

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could not fail of reforming both *private* and *public* vices, and promoting a *universal zealous* cultivation and pursuit of virtue. And when there are but *a few* who make conscience of it, there is *so much*, however, *gained* to virtue's cause, and to the happiness of Human nature; which is a very important argument to persuade such piously disposed persons to *constancy*, even in the most *degenerate* times. To which we may add, that it can never be shewn to be *inconsistent* with the *wisdom* of providence, for the sake of their prayers, to *suspend*, for a while at least, the *vengeance* due to a sinful people, and grant them some *temporal* privileges.

SECONDLY, in our prayers for *families* or *private persons*, in which we petition for any *natural good*, or deprecate any *natural evil* —— we must take care not to ask such things as are *beyond* the *stated course* of nature, and require a *miraculous* interposition; nor solicit the direction and assistance of the Deity in *trifling cases* that are *unworthy* of it. And if we avoid these and such like irregularities, and offer up our

our ſupplications for *temporal* bleſſings with *due ſubmiſſion* to the infinite wiſdom of the all-diſpoſing mind; it is no more *abſurd* upon the nation of a particular providence (by the exerciſe of which *any* natural *good* may be ſecured, or *any* natural *evil* averted from *families* or *individuals*) to make ſuch prayers for *others*, than it is to do it for *ourſelves*. And as the bleſſings of the *preſent life* are not *always*, nor perhaps generally, beſtowed on men as the *reward* of their *own virtues*; they may ſometimes, for any thing we can urge to the contrary, be *wiſely* granted to *one* who is himſelf unworthy of them, in anſwer to *another* man's prayers, and as a proper encouragement and reward of *his* piety.

THIRDLY, when we pray for the advancement and encreaſe of *truth* and *virtue* in *general* —— we can ſcarcely doubt of the *acceptance* of the Deity, if we conſider that he is an abſolutely *holy* being, delighted with the *rectitude* of his own moſt perfect nature; and conſequently one that cannot but be highly pleaſed, to ſee

his

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his *moral perfections universally imitated.* Or if we represent him to our minds under the character of the *wise governour* of the rational world, nothing surely can be more *agreeable* to him than a steady pursuit of *truth* and *virtue*; which is, in other words, an *observance* of *his laws.* Or finally, as the *father* of mankind, who bears the most perfect benevolence and tender affection to his offspring, he can *approve* of nothing more than the *moral rectitude* of his reasonable creatures; with which their truest, most substantial, and lasting *happiness* is inseparably connected.

INDEED, as mankind are in a state of *trial*, their pursuit of truth and virtue must, as was before observed, be the matter of their *own choice*; and therefore it cannot be expected, since it is unsuitable to the make and condition of their nature, that they should be *necessarily* determined to goodness by an *irresistible* operation upon their minds. So that when we pray for the *advancement* of *piety* and *righteousness*; or, in the language of

of that most excellent *model* of prayer which our Saviour taught his disciples, that God's *kingdom may come*, and his *will be done on earth as it is in heaven*; we can mean *no more*, if we pray with the *understanding*, and *agreeably* to those *general rules* which are established for the government of the moral world, than to desire of him——" that he would afford " mankind all necessary *knowledge*, and all " proper *advantages* for the discharge of " their duty, and furnish them with *suffi-* " *cient motives* to encourage creatures, " endued with such powers and capaci- " ties, to the diligent and constant prac- " tice of it; and take the most *effectual* " methods, *consistent* with their *free a-* " *gency* and the *trial* of their *fidelity* " (whether by secret *influences* upon their " minds, or in *any other* way that to his " infinite wisdom may seem most *ex-* " *pedient*) to cause *truth* and *holiness* ge- " nerally to prevail, and triumph over " *error* and *vice*." And tho' it should be allowed, that the *rectitude*, but especially the *absolute goodness*, of his nature might incline him to do this without being

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petitioned for it, in order to promote an event, in which the honour of his own perfections and the happineſs of his reaſonable creatures are ſo nearly concerned; the *praying* for it may ſtill be of great *uſe*, and conſequently *a ſervice* founded in *reaſon*, and worthy his *acceptance* whoſe nature is the *ſupreme* and moſt *perfect* reaſon, as it will *naturally* put *every man*, who performs it with a ſerious mind, upon refining his own *moral diſpoſitions*, and aſpiring after the *perfection* of *virtue*, in order to *introduce* that bleſſed *ſtate* of things which he ſo *ardently deſires*, when *the wickedneſs of the wicked ſhall come to an end, and the juſt be eſtabliſhed.* I now proceed,

IN the LAST place, to conſider the *reaſonableneſs* of *thoſe prayers*, in which we deſire *aſſiſtance* for particular perſons to reclaim them from *error* and *vice*, and promote their *moral perfection*. And without doubt we may ſafely go ſo far, as *to pray* in *general*——"that the bleſſed "God, who *deſireth not* the *death* of "*ſinners*, but *rather* that they would "*repent* and *live*, would take all *ſuch* "*methods*

"*methods* for the *recovery* of those who "are ignorant and vicious, as are not "*dishonourable* to his own perfections, "nor contrary to the wise designs of "his providence; and that if there are "*any means, consistent* with his infinite "wisdom and purity, which are likely "to be *more effectual* than those which "have been already afforded them, he "would be pleased to make use of *these* to "bring about so desirable an end."—— But to *pray* for the conversion of those who are quite abandoned to vice, and who, instead of *desiring* our prayers, ridicule and make a jest of them as weak and enthusiastical—— "this is what I can "see scarce any warrant for, either in "*reason* or in *revelation*." If a sense of their sins puts such persons upon *praying* for *themselves*, the *thoughts* of their *hearts*, and the iniquities of their lives, *may* be *forgiven* them; but *without this*, the *intercessions* of others are likely to have very little effect. For men can only expect *divine assistances* to co-operate with their *natural powers*; and when any give themselves up *entirely* to the gratification of

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their irregular appetites, in defiance of the *authority* of *heaven*, and the *law* of their *reasonable nature*, they are in great danger of being abandoned by God to *a reprobate mind*, and consequently to *misery* and *destruction*.

WHAT I have hitherto said relates *only* to *praying* for others, in the *strict* sense of the word. To the other branch of the duty mentioned in the text, *viz. giving of thanks*, I need say but little; because it is as evidently calculated to strengthen the *divine* principle of *universal benevolence* as *intercession*, and seems to be *natural* to a truly *charitable* and *generous* heart, that is affectionately concerned for its fellow-creatures, and rejoices in their prosperity. There is scarce any man, who does not think himself *obliged* to return *thanks* to almighty God for *family* and *national* mercies, as well as for those which are purely *private* and *personal*. Let him but *extend* his views, and he will find that *all mankind* constitute *one publick community*, who are governed by the *same laws*, and ought to pursue one *common interest*; that they have all

one

one father of their *ſpirits*, and are *derived* from the ſame *original parent* of their *earthly* nature: For God *hath made of one blood all nations of men, to dwell on all the face of the earth.*——Let us be perſuaded, therefore, to act as becomes our *generous* and *ſocial* frame, by a frequent and chearful diſcharge of this *reaſonable*, moſt *natural*, and *important* duty; that we may be the better *fitted* to live and converſe hereafter (with tranſporting and ineffable delight) among *ſuperior* gracious ſpirits of moſt *enlarged* and *pure* benevolence, and under the eternal ſmiles of the *God* of *love*, whoſe *compaſſions* are *immutable*, and his *tender mercies over* all *his works.*——And as, even in the *preſent* world, we are all of us ſometimes *forced* to converſe with *ourſelves*, it muſt be of the higheſt concernment to us to eſtabliſh and improve *ſuch* diſpoſitions and habits as, when we look *inward*, will yield an agreeable and pleaſing entertainment.——That *diffuſed* and *ardent* ſpirit of humanity, which the exhortation in the text inſpires, we ſhall ſurvey with continual *approbation* and *complacency:* But if this be wanting,

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Acts xvii. 26.

SERM. XIV. and we do not find ourselves *raised* above the *corrupt* influence of a *contracted* and *selfish* temper, our *own hearts* and *real characters* will be the most *ungrateful* objects we can contemplate, and can excite no other passions in us but *shame* and *self-abhorrence*.

SERMON

SERMON XV.

Of Idolatry; and Visiting the Sins of the Fathers upon the Children.

EXODUS XX. 4, 5, 6.

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing *that* is *in heaven above, or that* is *in the earth beneath, or that* is *in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them.——For I the LORD, thy God,* am *a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers*

upon the children unto the third and fourth generation *of them that hate me; and ſhewing mercy unto thouſands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.*

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THERE are *two* kinds or degrees of idolatry, plainly repugnant to the immutable law of nature, and the eſſential principles of revealed religion: The one is, the ſetting up an idol-*deity*; the other, an idolatrous *manner* of *worſhip*. To underſtand the *ground* of this diſtinction, we need only attend to the general account which St. *Paul* has given us of an *idol*, *that* it is *nothing in the world*; i. e. it is entirely a *chimera*, the *wild ſuggeſtion*, the *mere creature*, of a depraved judgment and licentious fancy, but has no real exiſtence in the *nature* of things, nor foundation in *reaſon*. A *falſe* therefore, which is the ſame as a *non-exiſting*, muſt in the ſenſe of this Apoſtle be an *idol* God: And the introducing

1 Cor. viii. 4.

cing unwarranted and unnatural *mediums* of worſhip, or irrational and improper repreſentations of the *object* of worſhip, muſt be an *idolatrous* practice. SERM. XV.

AND the ſecond commandment, in different views of the prohibition contained in it, may include both of theſe. When the worſhip payed is deſigned to *center* in the image (as perhaps may be the caſe among ſome groſsly rude and ſavage nations) " the eternal and ſovereign God " is in effect *annihilated*, and an *idol* is " permitted to *uſurp* his throne as the " object of *ſupreme* veneration;" if an imaginary *inferior* God (as was undeniable *fact*, in innumerable inſtances, among the *Heathens* of old) be ſerved and adored through an *image*; " the *object*, " and the *manner*, of worſhip are both " *idolatrous*." But if the honours allotted to images be intended to *terminate* in the *true* and *living* God, the ſource of all perfection and power; " then the *idolatry* reſpects, and is confined to, the " *mode* of worſhip only."

THIS is fully ſufficient to ſhew, that what is forbidden in that divine law of the

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the decalogue, which we are now considering, is properly and ſtrictly *idolatry*. And indeed, in the primary view and acceptation of the word, *idolatry* had a more immediate relation to the religious honours conferred upon ſenſeleſs and impotent images; and there was ſcarce an act of devotion paid to an idol-*deity*, by the deplorably bewildered and degenerate *Pagans*, but what was performed before ſome *image*.—— And as the offence itſelf founded on the moſt *mean* and *irreverent* apprehenſions of God, and tends to the utter extirpation of *reaſon*, and corruption of all *moral* principles; as the *Jews*, to whom this precept was firſt delivered, were *ſurrounded* on all ſides by nations addicted, and pertinaciouſly devoted, to the *ſeveral idolatries* therein forbidden, and were themſelves *inclined* to practiſe the like impieties, from the impreſſions which they had received, too ſtrong to be eaſily eraſed, in favour of *ſuperſtition* and a *ſymbolical worſhip*, while they reſided in *Egypt*; and, finally, as a great part of the pretended *Chriſtian* world are actually involved in the

the ſame error, and other communities more truely *chriſtian* (at leaſt as to matters of *faith* and the external *form* and *order* of their worſhip) ſtill retain ſome *traces* of *idolatry*, and ſome *occaſions* of *ſcandal* by which it may be again introduced: Upon theſe accounts, I ſay, it was wiſe in God to inſtitute, and diſtinguiſh, the law contained in the text as one of the moſt ſacred in the whole diſpenſation of *Moſes*; and it is highly expedient in the preſent times, that it ſhould be particularly explained and enforced. And the rather, becauſe as the obligation of the firſt commandment reſults from the *neceſſary exiſtence* and *unity* of the ſupreme Being; ſo the reaſons of this alſo, as will be demonſtrated in the following diſcourſe, "do not derive themſelves from any thing *peculiar* in the circumſtances of the *Jewiſh* nation, but are equally *moral* and *invariable*." I therefore now recommend, and ſhall conſider, it as an *original* law of God, an *eternal* law, a law as *extenſive* as Human nature itſelf, and an indiſpenſable branch of *Chriſtian* morality, that *thou ſhalt not make*

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SERM. XV. *make unto thee any graven image, or any likeneſs* of any thing *that* is *in heaven above, or that* is *in the earth beneath, or that* is *in the water under the earth: Thou ſhalt not bow down thyſelf to them, nor ſerve them.*

To guard againſt this moſt deſtructive error to all rational piety and virtue, in *every form* in which it is poſſible for it to prevail and to be eſtabliſhed, the precept itſelf is expreſſed in the ſtrongeſt and moſt excluſive terms; hardly capable of being miſunderſtood by the moſt ignorant, or evaded by the moſt artful and ſophiſtical reader.——*Thou ſhalt not make unto thee* ANY *graven image, or* ANY *likeneſs*——any *figure*, or *repreſentation.* And as if this, which one would think could never be darkened by the moſt profound comments, was not ſufficient, the *univerſal* prohibition is ſtill more *diſtinctly* explained, to make it obvious, without the leaſt room for heſitation, to the loweſt degrees of human reaſon. If the expreſſions had been only *general*, without an enumeration of particulars, " *exceptions* " might have been *imagined* of ſome ob-

" jects,

" jects, of ſingular *magnificence*, *perfec-* " *tion*, and *uſe* in the creation;" and theſe *ſpeciouſly* repreſented, might have confounded weak minds, and have impoſed upon the credulous. But when it is ſaid *not* any *graven image*, *or* any *likeneſs* of any thing *that* is *in* HEAVEN *above*, *or that* is *in the* EARTH *beneath*, *or that* is *in the* WATER *under the earth*——" this " comprehends minutely the whole *frame* " and *ſcope* of nature, and *every* being, " rational or irrational, animate or ina- " nimate, that exiſts in it." It includes likewiſe, under the phraſe *any likeneſs*, all *pictures*, together with graven images, as unlawful and prohibited; as indeed the reaſon of the thing equally *condemns* both, or *juſtifies* both. And it is too abſurd a poſition to need any confutation, that a *painter* may *lawfully* form *idols* to be worſhipped, of men and brute animals, of ſtars and vegetables, and groſs corporeal repreſentations of God himſelf; which immediately loſe their *innocence*, and become inſtances of heinous *impiety*, when produced or exhibited by the ſkill of the *engraver*. For, according to this

way

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way of arguing, the command muſt have been chiefly levelled, contrary to the expreſs letter of the text and the common ſenſe of mankind, "not againſt *worſhipping*, "but againſt *carving* the image." Such wretched and ridiculous ſhifts as theſe can ſcarce be treated in a ſerious manner, "which ſuppoſe the *different workman-* "*ſhip* of the artificer to conſtitute and "define *moral good* and *evil*."

SOME of the moſt antient *Chriſtian* writers were of opinion, that the *making* any image was in virtue of this command criminal, abſtract from all conſideration of the *uſe* or *ſervice* to which it was appropriated: Which notion they very probably learned from the *Jews*, who, in the laſt period of their ſtate, were ſo averſe to *idolatry*, that they ran into the other extreme of, I think, *ſuperſtition*; in this inſtance, indeed, directly *oppoſed* to idolatry, and therefore juſtly denominated the *other extreme*, but in many caſes naturally *connected* with, and leading to it. And prepoſſeſſed with this ſentiment, they reduced the ſecond precept of the decalogue to three heads.——*Thou ſhalt not* make

make *any image*——*thou ſhalt not* bow down *to it*——*thou ſhalt not* worſhip *it*. But it is plain, from the general ſcope and moſt natural conſtruction of the law itſelf, that the making the image was only condemned in this preciſe and determinate quality, of *making it to be worſhipped:* And the reaſon annexed——*I am a jealous God*——will only ſuit with this interpretation of it. For thou ſhalt not proſtrate thyſelf, nor pay religious adoration, to inanimate images, becauſe *I the Lord thy God am a jealous God*, this has energy and a very important meaning in it; but I am *a jealous God*, therefore thou ſhalt not make an image or picture for *any purpoſe* whatſoever, where is the *ſignificancy*, where the *weight* and *concluſiveneſs* of this argument? It might as well have been ſaid (and the inference would have been altogether as rightly drawn) I am a *faithful*, or a *merciful* God: Which ſhews moſt plainly that it is not a juſt deduction, becauſe it would *equally* follow upon admitting quite *different* premiſes. But not to inſiſt longer on what are, at leaſt in my judgment, miſtakes of the true meaning

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ing of this precept, I now proceed to ſpecify particularly the ſeveral kinds of *idolatry* that are forbidden by it: And they may all be reduced to the following heads,

FIRST, as *abſolutely immoral*, the repreſenting the everlaſting and ſupreme God under *any material* and *viſible ſimilitude.*

SECONDLY, the *worſhipping* images as containing *ſymbolical characters* of any of the perfections of the ſovereign Deity, or of any perſons or things, that thus *deſcribe* and *figure* out the eſſential attributes of the Creator and ſupreme God of the univerſe.

THIRDLY, the uſing ſuch images as *mediums* of worſhip, ultimately paid to the *true* God; or to idol-*gods*, or idol-*mediators.*

FOURTHLY, the paying religious honours to them as having the *ſupreme*, or any *inferior*, divinity *preſent* with them in an extraordinary way, or peculiarly *reſiding* in them.

FIFTHLY,

FIFTHLY, the precept in the text seems to me to forbid not only internal service, and offices of religion directed to the image, but the paying it marks of *reverence* and *outward honour*. SERM. XV.

AND, in the LAST place, the grossest extreme and stupidity of this kind of idolatry is, terminating the worship in the *images themselves*. Each of these propositions I shall explain, where the terms may be thought obscure, and briefly illustrate and confirm.

IN the FIRST place then, I apprehend, that the text condemns, as *absolutely immoral*, the *describing* the everlasting and supreme God under *any material* and *visible similitude*. That this was intended in the commandment itself, appears undeniably from the reason by which *Moses* re-inforced the observation of it on all the people of *Israel*, in the fourth chapter of the book of *Deuteronomy*. His words are exceedingly remarkable——*Take ye good heed*, says he, *unto yourselves*,——(*for ye saw no manner of* SIMILITUDE *on the day* that *the Lord* ver. 15, 16.

SERM. XV. *ſpake unto you in* Horeb *out of the midſt of the fire) leaſt ye corrupt* yourſelves, *and make you a graven image, the ſimilitude of any figure:* "Where the force of the argu-
" ment, *for ye ſaw no ſimilitude*, is directly
" and immediately levelled againſt *making*
" the image, and only by conſequence, and
" more remotely, againſt *worſhipping* the
" image." And other ſacred writers, both among the Prophets and Apoſtles of our Lord, repreſent this prohibition as founded not on mere *poſitive authority*, but on *reaſons* that are *moral* and *perpetual*. Thus the prophet *Iſaiah*, having ſet forth the exalted and ſuper-eminent majeſty of God in moſt grand and lofty expreſſions (——as that he *hath meaſured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with a ſpan, comprehended the duſt of the earth in a meaſure, weighed the mountains in ſcales, and the hills in a balance*; and that *all nations before him are as nothing, they are counted to him leſs than nothing, and vanity)*——he immediately adds, *to whom then will ye liken God, or what likeneſs will ye compare unto him?*——Which is the ſame as if he had expreſsly ſaid, "that no ſuch at-
" tempt

Iſa. xl. 18.

"tempt ought *ever* to be made, that "it is absolutely *unnatural* and *monstrous* "in itself, and a *derogation* from the "*matchless glory* of the supreme Divinity." Upon the same principles St. *Paul* argued, when he imputed it to the *Heathens* as an instance of most wretched infatuation and inexcusable impiety; that they *changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like unto corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.* Rom. i. 23.

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If then *degrading* the most High be *unfit* in its own nature, at all times, and in all supposable circumstances; the representing him under the figure of any *material* being in the universe must be absolutely and eternally *immoral.* It is a shocking indignity offered to the boundless wisdom, the omnipotence, the immensity of the divine nature, to pretend to *describe* it by what necessarily involves, in the very idea of it, *folly*, *imperfection*, *weakness*, and *limited existence*; or "by "*mathematical* figures, of a *determinate* "*shape* and *narrow bound*, to give *any* "*notion* at all, and much more an *ac-*

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"*curate* notion of him, who has *no* "ſhape, and whoſe eſſence, duration, "and dominion are *uncircumſcribed.*" It is an offence againſt the light of *nature*; a direct oppoſition to the *revealed law* of God; it diſgraces the *Proteſtant* religion, by its *ſymboliſing* ſo groſsly with the *idolatrous* corruptions of the church of *Rome*; and renders *Chriſtianity itſelf*, tho' unjuſtly, the object of contempt and inſult: And, finally, it tends to *eraſe* from the minds of the *vulgar*, all rational veneration of God; and to inſpire ſuch *low* and *carnal* apprehenſions concerning him, as muſt naturally terminate either in *prophaneſs* or *ſuperſtition.* But,

SECONDLY, the command given in the text forbids, farther, the *worſhipping images*, as containing *ſymbolical repreſentations* of any of the perfections of the ſublime incomprehenſible Deity; or of any perſons or things, that thus *deſcribe* and *figure* out the eſſential attributes of the ſovereign God of the univerſe.——As if, for example, any ſhould pay religious reverence to a *lion*, or an *elephant*, as on account of their ſtrength *fitted* to repreſent

ſent the *power* of God; or to the *ſun* as the nobleſt *viſible emblem* of that *ſupreme ſpirit*, which chears and animates univerſal nature. This was the defence, that ſome of the moſt diſcerning and ſagacious *Heathens*, of old, made for their national and publick *idolatries:* And though it was, I ſuppoſe, the *beſt* vindication of the eſtabliſhed *ſuperſtition* of their country, that they could then invent——that it was conſecrated *ultimately* to *the Father of Gods and Men*, and not intended to center in the viſible *idols*; yet it was in truth a moſt *abſurd* and *lame* vindication, unbecoming the *reaſon* of *a man*, and much more unworthy of perſons of ſuperior penetration. For the *emblems* themſelves were entirely *inadequate* to, and infinitely *beneath*, the dignity, and glory, and excellence of the *object* deſigned to be *repreſented*; and, therefore, could not poſſibly convey any *juſt idea* of it. "Be-
"ſides, as the compariſon is ſuppoſed to
"be made for the ſake of the *common*
"*people* (who otherwiſe, it is pretended,
"would be able to form ſcarce any no-
"tion at all of the Deity) their *firſt ſenſe*

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"of things, unused to art and subtilty, "would naturally lead them to think, "that the objects *compared* were *alike*; "and not *vastly*, *totally*, *infinitely* diffe-"rent:" And, of consequence, their apprehensions of the supreme God must be *debased*, and their inward reverence of him *lessened* and *impaired* by *all* such symbolical representations. But as this part of my discourse has not much relation to the present times, I content myself with having just mentioned it, as what naturally fell within the scope of the second commandment; and shall now proceed to another head, in which *Christians* and *Pagans* are equally concerned. And that is,

IN the THIRD place, that the second commandment, which is the subject of our present consideration, forbids the using *images* as *mediums* of worship *ultimately* paid to the *true* God, or to idol-*Gods*, or idol-*Mediators*. That this is the doctrine of the Old Testament, to which this precept more immediately belongs, will be unanswerably demonstrated by the single instance of the *Israelites* worshipping

ſhipping the *golden calf* in the wilderneſs, and the account given of it in theſe ſacred writings. Upon the firſt view of that hiſtory, it muſt appear altogether extravagant to ſuppoſe, that this people could ever imagine the *image itſelf*, which they knew to be their own *invention*, and their own *workmanſhip*, to be the very *eternal* and *ſelf-exiſtent* JEHOVAH, their God, and gracious deliverer. It was, indeed, abſolutely impoſſible that they ſhould *thus* conceive of it, while they retained any ſparks or glimmerings of reaſon. They therefore, in all probability, "only intended it as a *medium*, "thro' which to preſent their *ſupreme* "veneration and reſpect to the *ultimate* "object of it, the *God* of *Iſrael:* Upon "which account the day, when this *idol* "was firſt exhibited, is expreſsly ſtiled "*a feaſt to the Lord.*" But notwithſtanding this, it is evidently deſcribed as an act of *idolatry*, by the *Pſalmiſt* in theſe words: *They made a calf in* Horeb, *and worſhipped the molten image; thus they changed their glory into the ſimilitude of an ox that eateth graſs.* And it muſt be

Numbers xxxii. 5.

Pſalm cii. 19, 20.

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entirely needless to attempt to prove, after what has been now said, that the case is the same with respect to the worshipping *false Gods*, or mere *imaginary Mediators*, by *images*; because it is undeniable, in all such instances, that the *object*, and the *manner*, of worship are both *idolatrous*.

IT is farther prohibited, by the second commandment, to pay religious honours to *images*, as having the *supreme*, or any *inferior*, Divinity *present* with them in an extraordinary way, or peculiarly *residing* in them. For this is what *human reason* can never *dictate*, thro' its almost absolute ignorance of the *order* and *oeconomy* of invisible worlds; it is what *revelation* has never *taught*, with respect to any images that can possibly be framed; nay, it is what it directly *discourages*, by prohibiting *image-worship* in *universal* terms, without a single exception *actually* made, or any *imaginable* exception. The *Deities* therefore, supposed to be here *residing*, can no more have a *proper substantial* existence, and must therefore as necessarily be *mere idols*, as any of the most and *irrational*

tional Deities, that were ever adored by the *Gentile* world. Besides, St. *Paul*'s reasoning, addressed to the *Athenians*, with respect to the living God who made *the world and all things therein*,——that *seeing he is Lord of heaven and earth*, he *dwelleth not in* TEMPLES *made with hands* ——must be to the full as *conclusive* a proof, if there be any evidence or demonstration at all in it, "that he dwell-"eth not in IMAGES made with hands."

Acts xvii. 24.

IT seems likewise, in the FIFTH place, to be forbidden by the text, to pay to *images* any marks of *external reverence* and *honour*. For in these words, *thou shall not bow down to them, nor serve them*, the *prostration* is, in the most natural and easy construction we can form of them, separated from *internal homage* and offices of religion, as a *distinct* article by itself. And the ground of this part of the prohibition was very probably this, to prevent our having the most *distant* participation in a crime, which has ever been the *bane* of *morality*, and of all *true religion*.

LASTLY,

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LASTLY, the most excessive and criminal degree of the *idolatry* condemned in the text is, when the worship offered is intended to terminate in the *images themselves.* And it is to be feared, that this, however strange and unaccountable, is too often the case in the lower class of mankind, who *grovel* in their apprehensions, have but little *strength* or *compass* of thought, and are hardly capable of extending their *view*, beyond the *visible object* which engages their veneration. I shall only add, that the scriptures seem to suppose that mankind *may* be thus abandoned of *reason*, and of all *right idea* and *sentiment* of Deity: For the Prophet *Isaiah* has, in effect, drawn the exact character of this most *depressed* and *degenerate* set of *idolaters*, in the following passages——

Isa. xliv. 14, 15, 17. *He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak——he planteth an ash——then shall it be for a man to burn——he kindleth it, and baketh bread——and the residue thereof he maketh a God,* even *his graven image: He falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it,*

it, and saith, deliver me, *for* THOU *art my* GOD. SERM. XV.

THERE still remains another very important point to be distinctly considered and explained——and that is, *that part* of the *reason* annexed to this commandment (to deter the *Jews* from imitating the customs of the neighbouring idolaters,) which asserts *the* LORD to be *a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.*——For how, it may be asked, can such a *rigorous* proceeding as this be reconciled with the priuciples of eternal and most perfect wisdom, which are the basis and support of God's moral government; or with those sacred and irreversible rules of *equity*, by which it must be supposed to be, at all times, conducted? How can it be reconciled to the doctrine so strongly inculcated by the Prophet *Ezekiel:* Who when the *Jews*, in his time, represented the judge of all the earth as arbitrary and cruel, in punishing *them* for their *fathers* crimes, expressly declared, that the great and sovereign judge had an *equal* and *impartial* regard to *all* his creatures con-

SERM. XV. Ezekiel xviii. 4.

considered *merely* as his creatures; that *all souls* were *his*, as *the soul of the father*, so also *the soul of the Son*; and that every man should be rewarded or punished, only as he had *deserved* reward or punishment, by his own personal behaviour? And God himself is described as appealing to the *sober judgment* of his accusers, and their uncorrupted *sense* of morality, whether this standing inviolable rule and order of his supreme dominion was not strictly and unexceptionably *just*; whether it was not absolutely the *most* wise and impartial, nay the *only* wise and impartial, method of proceeding, in the government of rational and free creatures. As the case now stated has been esteemed a considerable difficulty, which is necessary to be removed, in order to set God's universal *moral rule* in a worthy and venerable light; I shall endeavour to suggest some brief hints towards a full and satisfactory solution of it.

AND, FIRST, I apprehend that it will be but of little weight in clearing this objection to assert, what is indeed undeniably true, that by *visiting the iniquities of*

the

the fathers upon the children is meant, in the text, only "a *temporary* and *national* "punishment;" because the passage, in the Prophecy of *Ezekiel*, relates to *temporary* and *national* punishments likewise. For when the *Jews* made use of this proverb concerning the land of *Israel*, that *the fathers* had *eaten sowre grapes*, and *the childrens teeth* were *set on edge*, it is evident almost to a demonstration, that they must have intended this, and this *only*; that they *actually* suffered as a *community*, and not that they should *hereafter* suffer as *individuals*, for the offences and corruptions of their forefathers. So that the punishment referred to in both passages being, as to *kind*, exactly one and the same, this rather encreases, than at all diminishes, what appearance there is of a *contradiction*.

Ezekiel xviii. 2.

SECONDLY, of as little force, with respect to the argument as it now stands to be considered, is another observation, *viz.* that the *visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children* is, in this law of the decalogue, "appropriated to the "crime of *idolatry*." For tho' there might

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might be ſolid reaſons for *guarding* againſt an offence, that defeated the grand deſign of the *Jewiſh* conſtitution, by the threatning of ſome moſt ſevere and remarkable *penalty*; yet, if the penalty be *unjuſt* in itſelf, it muſt be ſo in all inſtances, and with reſpect to all enormities without *exception*, however heinous in their nature, or fatal in their conſequences. And, beſides, *Ezekiel* has expreſsly mentioned the *ſon* of an *idolater*, as one that *ſhall not* bear his father's iniquities. We may add to all this, that our bleſſed Saviour has aſſerted the ſame thing in ſubſtance (as that which is denounced in the text) with reſpect to *other* flagrant vices; particularly *perſecution*, and *murder*: *Behold*, ſays he, *I ſend unto you prophets, and wiſe men, and Scribes; and* ſome *of them ye ſhall kill and crucify; and* ſome *of them ſhall ye ſcourge in your ſynagogues, and perſecute* them *from city to city. That upon you may come all the righteous blood ſhed upon the earth——Verily I ſay unto you, all theſe things ſhall come upon this generation*; i. e. in other words, God will *viſit* your wicked *anceſtors*, as well as

Mat. xxiii. 34, 35, 36.

your

your own, persecutions and murders, on you their children and descendents. —We must therefore defend the wisdom and equity of that particular kind of punishment, which is threatned in the text, upon some more *extensive* principle, than the *peculiar* character and guilt of *Idolatry*.

I WOULD observe farther, THIRDLY, that neither the second commandment, nor *Ezekiel* in the chapter above referred to, spake "of the *natural evil consequences* "of vice, but of *positive* punishments." That the command did not *intend* such consequences, provided as *penalties* in the *established frame* of things, is evident, because *visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children*, in this construction of the phrase, can with very little colour of reason be fixed as the *certain* punishment of *idolatry*; which considered in itself, and, as it may *possibly* be in the *nature* of things, abstracted from other *immoralities*, is not so likely to bring *temporal* distress and calamity upon nations or private persons, as *luxury*, *fraud*, and many *other* crimes that might be easily specified; nor, con-

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consequently, are the mischievous effects of it, resulting from the *settled course* of *nature*, so likely to be felt by *posterity*. And further, this interpretation can, in my opinion, by no means be made to suit with the punishment's being restrained to the *third* and *fourth* generation (supposing, for the present, that expression to refer not to the *commencement*, but the *end*, of the punishment) because the *natural consequences* of crimes are not capable, without a miracle, of being thus *limited*; but as some of them may end *before*, so others, without an extraordinary interposition of providence, will, and must, last much *longer*: Besides that the expression itself——*God's visiting for sin*——will be found, I believe, always to imply something beyond the *ordinary* and *fixed* course of nature and providence. And it is equally improbable, on the other hand, that the prophet ever intended to declare, that children should not suffer *any evils* as the *natural effects* of their fathers wickedness; because such a position as this is confuted by universal and daily experience.

I EX-

I EXPECT now that it will be ſaid, that this way of *explaining* renders the ſubject rather more perplexed, and ſtrengthens the difficulty, inſtead of removing it. For we may as well *account* for childrens being liable to ſome misfortunes and calamities, on account of the irregularities of their forefathers, as for *any* natural evils which men have not *deſerved*, and *brought* upon themſelves. There are ſeveral moſt wiſe and neceſſary puniſhments, inflicted on groſs offenders in human government, which, in the unavoidable *connection* and *train* of events, are very injurious to their *deſcendents*. And, indeed, ſcarce any penalty can be ordained in caſes of moſt conſiderable moment; ſcarce any penalty, I ſay, *adapted* to the occaſion, and *ſufficient* to ſerve the ends of government, but what may, ſome way or other, affect the criminal's *poſterity*. This, therefore, being a *right* included in the idea of government in *general*, as *eſſential* to it, muſt be weakly and abſurdly objected to the *divine* government.——But if God immediately *interpoſes* to inflict evils upon any for the iniquities of their *anceſtors*, evils

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SERM. XV. evils which would not have happened in the *natural* course of things, and which they have not righteously *incurred* by any guilt of their own; this looks like punishing the *innocent*, and must, consequently, be unworthy an equitable and beneficent governour. As therefore the supposing the second commandment to mean a *positive* punishment seems to render the *injustice* more flagrant; so does it likewise the *inconsistency* between that, and the text quoted from *Ezekiel:* Since they both speak of *national* evils, and of evils confined to the *present life*.

But tho' the *nature* of the punishment, and the *scene* on which it is inflicted, be in both passages the *same*; yet the *subjects* of it are entirely *different*. The second commandment only speaks of God's *visiting the iniquities of the fathers* on *such* children as *inherit* their vices, and *imitate* their bad examples; the *third and fourth* generation *of them that hate me*, i. e. *continue* to manifest their contempt and hatred of me by persisting in their *idolatries*. And this is likewise agreeable to the general tenor of the Old Testament, and

and to every instance of childrens suffering from the immediate hand of God (these being always *wicked children*) for the vices of their *progenitors*. But the prophet *Ezekiel* speaks, on the contrary, of *such* of the offspring of degenerate and corrupted parents, as were themselves *good* and *virtuous*. So that, by this plain sentiment, all shadow of a *contradiction* between the two sacred writers is absolutely removed:——And all foundation likewise for complaining of *unequal distribution*, in the supreme judge of mankind. "For "as the persons supposed to *suffer* are "such as might be *righteously* punished, "by a *positive* infliction of the self-same "evils, without any regard to or consi- "deration of their *ancestors*, it necessa- "rily follows, that their punishment must "be absolutely just *in itself*; and there- "fore no particular determination of their "supreme governour *when*, or *how*, it "shall be inflicted in *this life* (which is "not the appointed scene of adequate "retribution) can make any alteration "*in the equity of the case upon the whole*. "If the punishment be in *its own nature*

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"righteous, it may be inflicted in *any* "*way*, and at *any time*, that will best "subserve the ultimate end of divine "government."

BUT it may still be objected, that if this be the import of the *threatning* annexed to the second commandment, it amounts to very little; because the *wicked children* of wicked parents would be punished, by the universal governour and disposer of events, for their *own* offences. To which I answer, that this is far from being *certain*, if we confine our reasoning, as the sense of the text obliges us to do, to the *present* probationary state; and that there are circumstances supposable, "in which mankind might not "have been punished *here*, if they had "not been the *depraved offspring* of *de*-"*generate ancestors*."

LET us imagine, for instance, *a society* to be corrupt and vicious: God may exercise *patience* towards *them*, as he does towards *private persons* (to see whether they will be *reclaimed* by *gentle* methods) before he proceeds to execute vengeance, and testify his severe displeasure against their

their iniquities. This, indeed, is a *worthy* idea of the wisdom and clemency of his government, to try if the *ruin* and *misery* of a whole people may not be prevented by their *reformation*. As the *fate* of a nation is a very great and important event, and its *destruction* what that most benevolent and compassionate being, who desires the happiness of all his creatures, cannot delight in (but must rather be *averse* to, unless urged by *indispensable* reasons of government) he may think it becoming his infinite wisdom not to punish the *first* offenders; to leave room for the *succeeding* generation to relinquish their fathers vices. But if they go on in *the same* track of *impiety*, and *a reformation* is not so *probable*, as when the offenders retained the principles and sentiments of their better education, then it may be a *fit* time to *punish*; to prevent the contagion from spreading *farther*, and from being transmitted down to *posterity*. In these cases (which must be at least allowed as possible) if the generation of men, who *suffer* under the severe visitations of providence, had been the *first* offend-

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ers, *they* might have been *ſpared* for the ſame reaſons, that, it is ſuppoſed, their *fathers* were. But, now, God having ſufficiently exerciſed his *patience* towards them as *a ſociety*, it may be *expedient* that he ſhould manifeſt his diſpleaſure againſt their *public* crimes, to vindicate and ſupport his royal authority, and demonſtrate viſibly that he is the governour among the *nations*; which can only be rewarded or puniſhed as *ſuch* in the *preſent* world. "And thus the *true reaſon* "why they are *puniſhed* will not be, ab- "ſolutely and ſtrictly ſpeaking, becauſe "they are *ſinners*; but becauſe they are "the *vicious deſcendents* of *impious* and "*wicked anceſtors*:" Nor is there any thing, in this method of proceeding, inconſiſtent with maxims of *juſtice*; becauſe, as was obſerved before, "they have *me-* "*rited* the *whole*, of what they are *ap-* "*pointed* to ſuffer, by their own *perſo-* "*nal* crimes."

SERMON

SERMON XVI.

On the Mediation of Christ.

1 Tim. ii. 5.

—And one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

I INTEND, in this discourse, to explain the *mediatorial* character and office of Christ; which gives such *scope* and *enlargement* to our ideas of the *oeconomy* and *order* of God's moral goverment, as unassisted nature could not attain to. The several branches of this mediatory constitution are, indeed, the principal points, by which the gospel is *distinguished* from mere natural religion; the primitive and invariable

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religion of all mankind. And yet it will be obvious to every cool and considerate inquirer, that though these are, as it were, the peculiar *complexion* and great *characteristic* of the Christian doctrine, they were not intended to form a scheme entirely *new*; but are all closely *connected*, and *interwoven*, with the essential branches of *the religion of nature*, which they were originally designed to explain and enforce.

THUS, for example, that God governs the world with perfect wisdom and rectitude, is the clear and undepraved sense of *nature*; "which must be content "with this *general* knowledge, and can-"not pretend to fix, *precisely*, in what "*particular manner* this government is "conducted."——Here then the gospel comes in properly to the *aid* of *reason*; and informs us that it is administred by *Jesus Christ*, invested with the authority of GOD. The government is undeniably *one* and the *same*, whether exercised *immediately*, or by a *substituted* power: So that in the general truth, the voice of *reason* and *Christianity* both concur. And

though reason could never have *discovered*, by its own strength and penetration, that the administration of this government was committed to *a delegate*, sufficiently authorised, and compleatly qualified, for the execution of so *vast* a design; yet it is equally certain, that it can produce no *decisive* objection against this notion of a *mediatorial* King and Lord of all; unless it be able clearly to demonstrate, "that "the *supreme* and *original* ruler of the "world is under an *immutable* obligation "to govern always by himself *alone*; "and that *great* and *wise* purposes may "not be served, by appointing a *subordi-* "*nate* power." But to assert this in cases, where we have no *competent* ideas, and scarce *any* comprehension at all of the subject; "and in *a particular case*, "in which we must be absolutely *un-* "*qualified* to judge with certainty, un- "less we have, actually before us, "*all* the *possible* reasons that may render "a particular oeconomy, *expedient* and "*fit*, in the *infinite* government of the "Almighty;" is a strain of arrogance and

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and presumption, as extravagantly *absurd*, as it is *impious*.

So, again, that God is in his nature absolutely *good*, and strongly disposed to shew *mercy*, is one of the *first* principles that *unperverted reason* teaches. But, then, though reason, unless it be terrified and quite enslaved by superstition, must look upon this as an *essential* perfection of the Deity, and as the most *illustrious* and *amiable* part of his moral character; it must also suppose, that the *exertions* and *displays* of his *mercy*, as well as those of his *power*, are, in all cases, directed and proportioned by *wisdom*. "And what is the *fittest* and "*properest* way, either of dispensing his "mercy upon *the whole*, or with respect "to any *particular system* of creatures, "requires faculties of much *larger* extent, "than those that are allotted to the *hu-*"*man* mind, to adjust and settle." In the *general* principle, that *God is merciful*, natural religion and revelation entirely *correspond*: But with respect to the *stated way* of distributing his *favours*, so as most effectually to subserve the ultimate end of his *moral* government, an extraordinary

nary revelation, *alone*, is capable of yield- SERM.
ing us clear and full *satisfaction*, —— XVI.
" Here therefore (as it was not unreason-
" able to suppose it *might*) the gospel *has*
" *actually* opened to us *a new constitution*,
" in the doctrine of *Christ the Mediator*."

THE *general notion* of a *Mediator* is what those, who, instead of modestly exercising and improving, make an idol of human reason, are apt upon the first proposal of it, and without *knowing* or *inquiring* what it *really* means, to traduce and vilify. And indeed the *reasons* of it have been so grosly *misrepresented*, as has given too much occasion, to superficial thinkers, to load it with reproach and censure. For God, considered in himself, has been described as an object of *horror*, and absolutely *inaccessible* by his frail offending creatures.——An *unnatural* imputation, and most *absurdly blasphemous!*——" For where can *access* be " found, if not to *infinite mercy?*" To whom can the miserable, to whom can penitent sinners, so *freely* apply for *relief* and *pardon*, as to the *only* being in the universe, whose goodness is *unlimited* and

strictly

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strictly *immutable?* Can *communicated* mercy be more generous, condescending, and compassionate, than *original* and *eternal* mercy? Or if the supreme being be, in particular cases, *averse* to all commiseration; dare any inferior being *presume* to intercede as a Mediator? To *dictate mercy* to him that is all-perfect, to attempt to make him more *compliable*, to sooth and mollify him into greater *benignity* and *indulgence?* If God be, in himself, an unchangeable and unerring pattern of every thing that is *right* and *fit*; would not such a Mediator act an *indecent*, nay, an *immoral*, part? Would he not behave in a manner unbecoming an *intelligent* being, "if he should *sue* for mercy, *any* "*farther* than God is by *nature* merci-"ful?" On the contrary, if any circumstances could be supposed, in which the supreme model of every thing truly worthy and noble might be imagined to be, *essentially* considered, unpropitious and inaccessible; is it not undeniably certain, "that *the Mediator also* ought to be in-"accessible?" Or can the Deity be *degraded* by the *exercise* of compassion, in the very

same

ſame caſe, in which the Mediator is *exalted* and *dignified* by *pleading* for compaſſion? And, to add no more, muſt not our humble ſupplications, even when they are offered through *a Mediator*, be *ultimately* preſented to the *divine mercy*? If ſo, it then neceſſarily follows, that the *true* ground, on which the mediatorial ſcheme was eſtabliſhed, could not be, "that God "was in himſelf either too *terrible*, or "too *reſentful*, or too *inexorable*, to be "*directly* addreſſed and invocated;" but this, and this *alone*, that ſome great and beneficial purpoſes might be ſerved by it, with reſpect to the *moral world* conſidered more at large, but eſpecially with reſpect to *mankind*, to whom the ſcheme itſelf appears to have a *peculiar* reference. And the true *Chriſtian* doctrine of a Mediator, the ſubſtance of which is, "that our bleſſed Saviour was *ap*-"*pointed*, by the *ſupreme authority* of "heaven and earth, to *reconcile* apoſtate "and rebellious men to their offended "Maker and Sovereign, and to be the "*diſtributer* of God's favour to mankind;" I ſay, this primitive and unadulterated doc-

trine

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trine of the gospel, concerning the *One Mediator*, carries not with it, in its general notion, the least shadow of a *contradiction* to *any* of the *truths* that *nature* inculcates; and will appear, I am perswaded, to *unite* and *harmonize* with *all* of them, in the distinct explication of its several parts.

WHETHER the mediatorial character of Christ may be properly said to have *commenced* till after his *resurrection*, when he had *all power* committed to him, and was constituted the *One Lord*, through *whom* are *all things*; I shall not at present minutely enquire. Thus much however may, I think, be safely affirmed, that there are several probabilities to incline us to believe, that *this* is the scheme laid down in the New Testament; and more particularly, that the *title* of *Mediator* is what Christ never *expressly* assumed to himself, during the time of his own publick ministry upon earth, nor was it ever ascribed to him till *after* his *exaltation* to *regal* dignity and power. But if we take his mediatorial office in the common construction

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of it, as *beginning* with his prophetic mission, and *including* the substance of what he either *did* or *suffered*, as the faithful messenger and servant of the most High; it will still approve itself, in every branch, to the candid and unprejudiced reason of mankind.——For that God should *commission* a particular person, and furnish him with *authentic credentials*, to *revive* true religion, when it was buried, and almost quite extinguished, under a heap of *barbarous* and *hurtful* superstitions——and that he should *even appoint* for this purpose, and to promote the eternal salvation of mankind, a being of the *first rank* and *dignity* in the moral creation——neither of these, I say, can appear at all strange to us, when we consider that his mercies are infinite, and not to be measured by the narrow extent of human sensations and affections; and that the *original worth* and *former transcendent glory* of the *instrument*, imployed in this generous design, had a natural tendency to conciliate greater *attention* to, and a more sublime *veneration* of, his doctrine: Which last is directly pointed

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pointed out to us (*Matt.* xxi. 37.) as the *immediate view* of providence, in this surprising instance of grace and condescension. And when the same excellent person, for *opposing* the *prejudices*, *superstitions*, and *vices* of the world, was, after a long course of preparatory indignities, tortured and put to death with the utmost ignominy, contrary to all the principles of justice and gratitude; that his *resolution* and *undaunted integrity* in submitting to such undeserved cruelties, without so much as once *prevaricating* in the sacred cause of truth, should be highly *honoured* and *rewarded* by the supreme Governour and judge of mankind —— is *a sentiment* perfectly *agreeable* to our *natural apprehensions* of his wisdom, equity, and goodness.

BUT the *death* of Christ is represented in the gospel in a different light: For we are not only told, that *God was in*, or through, *Christ reconciling the world unto himself*, but that we are *reconciled to* him *by the* death of *his Son*; that *we have redemption thro' his* blood, *the forgiveness of sins*; and that he hath *put away sin* *by*

2 Cor. v. 19.

Rom. v. 10.

Eph. i. 7.

by the ſacrifice *of himſelf.** — And it will without doubt be aſked, what is the *true ſenſe* of this doctrine; and how it may be reconciled with the eternal principles of *reaſon*, and the notions, which we are led by *nature* to entertain of God?

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* Heb. ix. 26.

To which I anſwer, that it is the *undeniable* doctrine of the New Teſtament, that the *death* of Chriſt was not *intended* "to render the Deity *propitious*, i. e. willing to be reconciled to his creatures "upon *fit* and *honourable* terms;" becauſe it was propoſed by *himſelf*, and the whole *uſe* and *efficacy* of it ſprings from his *appointing* and *declaring* it to be an *accepted ſacrifice*: So that it muſt of neceſſity ſuppoſe him "to have been *antecedently* propitious." The truth of the caſe therefore is, that it was "*an expedient* originally *proceeding from the* "*mercy* of God, and not the *argument*, "or *motive*, inducing him *to be merciful*."—What then could it *poſſibly* be, "but the *propereſt* and *wiſeſt* way, in "which he thought he could *diſpenſe* "his mercy?"— "But how the wiſeſt?" Not ſurely with reſpect to *any influence*

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upon himſelf, whoſe mercy was *complete* and *immutable*; it could therefore *only* be on account of the *moral uſes* of it, or to promote the *important ends* of God's moral government. And the *great purpoſes* which are evidently *ſerved*, by the expreſs command of God to conſider the *death* of Chriſt under the notion and character of *a ſacrifice*, are thoſe which follow.

FIRST, that it might be *a ſtanding memorial* of God's being *propitious*, and *inclined* to *pardon* the ſins of men; and an enforcement of that fundamental principle of *all* religion, that *he is a rewarder of them that diligently ſeek him:* "A "memorial co-inciding with the almoſt "*univerſal ſentiment* and *practice* of the "world (among whom *ſacrifices* were "eſteemed as an eſſential part of reli-"gion) and likely, upon that account, to "have a more *certain* and *powerful* in-"fluence."--SECONDLY, that it might be *a ſtanding memorial*, likewiſe, of the *evil* and *demerit* of ſin; and, conſequently, a perpetual *incentive* to *humility* and *repentance*.—And, THIRDLY, it ſeems to have been

been wisely appointed with this view likewise, viz. to supersede the *use* of all *future sacrifices*; which, extending even to *human* sacrifices, had been the most *depraved* and *unnatural* branch of *Heathen* superstition. And, therefore, that it might the better produce *this effect*, which was *worthy* the *care* of infinite wisdom and goodness, we are expressly informed, that Jesus Christ *hath, by* one offering, *perfected for ever them that are sanctified.* Hebr. x. 14.

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And, in the LAST place, "there is "formed, by this *constitution*, a beautiful *analogy* in a very considerable and "important point, between the *settled* "*methods* of God's *natural providence*, "and the *extraordinary operations* of his "*grace*;" which, perhaps, may justly be esteemed as one of the *principal reasons* of it.—By the *offence* of *Adam* in eating the forbidden fruit, the *Christian* revelation informs us, *death* was introduced into the world, and descended from *him* to *all* his *posterity*. Thus the Almighty maker of the world was pleased to *establish* the *order* and *course* of *nature*, with re-

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ſpect to mankind. And in this view of the caſe, death to all the *race* of *Adam* muſt be regarded as a *misfortune* only, brought upon them by the *fault* of *another* (which frequently happens in innumerable other inſtances) and not as a *proper puniſhment* of a *crime* committed by *themſelves*. But *this evil*, ſo far as it was *entailed* upon all men by a fix'd and unalterable law of *nature*, and was not the *conſequence* of their own *voluntary* tranſgreſſion, is (it may not perhaps be ſo proper to ſay, *entirely remedied*, as) *counterbalanc'd*, by *reſtoring* mankind, through Jeſus Chriſt, to a poſſibility of obtaining *eternal life*—An appointment, no more the *reward* of their own *perſonal* virtue and righteouſneſs, than the original and univerſal law of death was, according to the ſcripture account of it, a *puniſhment* of their *perſonal* crimes. Here, then, there evidently appears a *correſpondence* of deſign, and an admirable *harmony* in the divine conduct—The *whole* moſt *wiſely* and *equitably* proportion'd.—Here we ſee the *mercy* of God providing a *remedy* equally extenſive with the *misfortune*,

fortune, that, by his *just determination*, sin had occasion'd. And as the *first* constitution, with respect to the power of *death*, ought not to be esteemed as merely *capricious* and *arbitrary*, but was probably intended as an *awful testimony* of God's *displeasure* against sin; and as, with a view to this end, human nature was so *framed*, that the propagation of the *species* should also be the propagation of *mortality*, after it had *once* taken place: So the introduction of *life* by the *death* of Christ, considered as an *illustrious* instance of *goodness* and *compassion*, of *inflexible integrity* and *dutiful submission* to the Supreme Being, is a *bright* and *encouraging demonstration* of God's *delight* in eminent virtue, and of the *extraordinary honours* which he is disposed to confer upon it; and, consequently, a strong incentive to the *sublimest* acts of *piety* and *beneficence*. "So that the same *general* "*reason* runs through *both* the parts; and "the *whole* is admirably *adapted* to the "*ends* of moral government."

What

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What I have now offer'd, I take to be the *proper explanation* of the following passages, in St. *Paul's* epistle to the *Romans*.—That *if, through the offence of one, many be dead; much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace* (which is *by one man Jesus Christ*) *hath abounded unto many*— That *as by the offence of one*, judgment came *upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one*, the free gift came *upon all men unto justification of life.—That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord.* And if the *possibility* of obtaining eternal life by *all*, and the *actual* attainment of it by the *faithful servants* of God, be the *appointed consequence* of Christ's *offering himself up to death*—every one must easily see, that *his death* might be much more properly described as *a sacrifice*, than any *offerings* of *brute creatures*, which had *no such efficacy*; and the phrases (though after all in a great measure *figurative*) of our being *redeemed by his blood*, and *reconciled to God*

Rom. v. 15. 18. 21.

God by the death of his son (with others of a like import) must appear to have a *clear* and very *emphatical* meaning. SERM. XVI.

But to dismiss this topic, on which I have not time to enlarge——The gospel has farther declared to us, that because our blessed Saviour *humbled himself, and* [in pursuance of the command of the supreme God and Father of all] *became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*; therefore *God also hath highly exalted him*, hath committed to him *all* authority *in heaven and in earth*, and *constituted* him, under himself, *the head over all things* for the good of his *church*: So that the *government* of God is now mediatorially administered, and his *goodness* mediatorially dispensed. And in the conclusion of the whole scene, Christ will still appear in his *regal* character to *judge* the world; according to the general tenor of that *wise constitution*, whereby *the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.*—This is a short summary of the *mediatorial scheme*, from its *first commencement* to its *final* *com-*

See Mat. xxviii. 18. Philip. ii. 8, 9. Eph. i. 22.

John v. 22.

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completion; when the *fates* of all mankind being *judicially decided*, and consequently *the ends* of the *mediation* entirely *accomplished*, the *kingdom* shall be *delivered up to God, even the* Father; that *the* Son *also* himself may *be subject unto him who put all things under him—And God may be all in all.*

1 Cor. xv. 24. 28.

By this great and extensive scheme, the *wisest* and *best* beings in the universe are employed in offices becoming their dignity, and their exalted rank and character. God *himself* is represented as the original *contriver* and *author* of it, pursuing the dictates of his infallible wisdom, and prompted by his boundless goodness. The chief being *after* him (whose perfections of nature will admit of no *comparison*) is the person appointed to be the *mediator*. The holy spirit, as the *next* in rank and honour, acts as the *first minister* of this mediatorial government; having for his *assistants* the angels; who all *unite* in the glorious design of reducing mankind to the primitive paths of virtue, truth, and *happiness*, and in strengthning, raising, and comforting the *heirs of salvation*.

vation. So that, by this means, there is formed as it were a *ſcale* of benevolence *from* the firſt ſource and fountain of goodneſs, *through* the various intermediate orders of ſuperior ſpirits, quite *down* to mankind; who are taught, and ſtrongly *incited*, by theſe examples, to practice condeſcenſion, diſintereſted kindneſs, and tender ſympathy one towards another, and lenity and mercy even to inferior animals: That one actuating vigorous ſpirit of goodneſs and compaſſion may be *diffuſed* throughout the whole reaſonable creation of God.—Nor is there any thing, in the ſcheme of *mediation* in *general*, but what is plainly *analogous* to the eſtabliſhed ſyſtem both of *nature* and *providence*. The world, according to the *firſt* plan fixed by its Almighty Sovereign, is in a great meaſure, and ever will be, *mediatorially* governed; and *parents*, *guardians*, *civil rulers*, *friends*, *men* in common to *men*, in the neceſſary *interchanging* offices of human life, are, in moſt inſtances, the *intermediate inſtruments* of that good, which *originally* ſprings from the Divine bounty. The ſcheme of nature,

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therefore, being apparently a ſcheme of *mediation*, the idea of a mediator cannot be *in itſelf* abſurd, unleſs the conſtitution of nature be wrong—And, in conſequence, unleſs direct *Atheiſm* muſt take the place of *Chriſtianity*.

I beg leave to conclude with giving a ſhort account of what is, in my opinion, *the true goſpel of Chriſt*; of which the doctrine of his *mediation* is an eſſential and moſt important part. And the general ſubſtance of this divine inſtitution is — *natural religion and virtue revived*, when the knowledge of them was in a manner eraſed from the minds of men, by vice and wild enthuſiaſm; with the addition of two or three plain *poſitive inſtitutions*, guarded in the ſtrongeſt manner againſt *ſuperſtitious abuſes*, and adapted to enforce the eternal laws of morality, and a moſt exact and ſcrupulous regard to every branch of ſubſtantial and uſeful goodneſs.—But, more particularly, the principles recommended by it are theſe: "That there is *one God*, *the Father* and ſupreme Lord of all, who *created* and *governs* all things *by Jeſus Chriſt* — That man-

mankind are *accepted* with this infinite Being, upon whom their happineſs abſolutely depends, through *the righteouſneſs of faith*, co-inciding, in the final ſcope of it, with the general law of *ſincerity* * ; which, at the ſame time, that it condemns every inſtance of *wilful vice*, is condeſcending to the *involuntary infirmities* of human nature. — That the favour of God is extended to *all* mankind; his forgiving mercy to *all* true penitents; but diſpenſed in ſuch a way, that reaſon could neither *diſcover*, nor can juſtly *arraign*; an expedient wiſely pitched upon to encourage *repentance* by the hope of *mercy*, to inſpire ſinful men, undeſerving of the Divine favour, with conſtant ſentiments of *humility*, and to extirpate *ſuperſtition*.—That the Father of mankind is ever ready to *aſſiſt* them, in the purſuit of moral rectitude and happineſs; that he will hereafter *judge the world in righteouſneſs* (whom he has made neceſſarily *ſubject* to his government, and *accountable* for their behaviour) by *Jeſus Chriſt*:

* See this Matter particularly and fully explained in Serm. II. Vol. III. on *Juſtification*.

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And that when he allots to all impenitent offenders impartial retribution, in proportion to the various degrees of their guilt, he will munificently reward his faithful and obedient ſervants (from the immutable pleaſure he takes in virtue, and to render it finally *triumphant* and *victorious* over iniquity and vice) with immor- "tal felicity and honour." — A ſcheme this, upon the whole that one would think every *conſiderate*, every *religious*, every truly *moral*, man muſt highly eſteem and venerate: And all who heartily *believe* it, and allow it to have its natural and juſt *influence*, will *probably* be *happy* in peace and ſublime joy of mind here, and, *infallibly*, in the everlaſting favour of God hereafter.

FINIS.

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